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BERTIE WILFORD TALKS TO HEBE IN A LIGHT-HEARTED MANNER ABOUT HIS PROSPECTS IN LIFE.

## THE SECRETS AND SHADOWS OF CASTLEGRANGE.

—O:—

### CHAPTER I.

"BERTIE," I said patiently, "I do really think it is time we were going home."

"Not yet, Hebe. Not just yet," Bertie made answer. "You wait a bit. I must finish this, you know, before we go."

It was about the third time that I had said the same thing, only perhaps in different words, within the past quarter of an hour; and for the third time Bertie Wilford had answered me in his careless, light-hearted way that he was unwilling to quit his perch upon the fence before his sketch was done.

"Well, the grass is getting damp; I can feel it is," I remarked presently, patting the turf at my side.

Bertie Wilford, my boy companion, laughed then; still drawing rapidly in and without looking up from the pocket sketch-book upon his knee.

"Why, if that's the case, what a little duffer

you must be to sit there!" said he. "Jump up directly, Hebe, do you hear! If you were to catch cold or anything, Mrs. Joyce would be for pitching into me and saying it was all my fault. You know perfectly well that whenever you come out with me, I always promise to look after you."

I laughed myself at this; chiefly at the absurd idea of Mrs. Joyce's "pitching into" anybody. The notion was too ridiculous—she could never do such a thing, I knew, if she tried. However, I obeyed Bertie, and rising forthwith from the field ground, stood there by the rough and rickety fence and peeped at the little picture his pencil was so busy over.

"How fond you are of drawing the Martello towers, Bertie," I observed. "Are they so easy to draw, then?"

"Not particularly. But of course it all depends upon your point of view—distance—perspective—and so forth. You don't understand these things yet, Hebe, and you won't until you begin to learn to draw yourself. Besides, a man who means to be an artist and make a name for himself would never get on in his profession if he only drew and studied easy things."

"I think you are very industrious, Bertie; and I'm sure you ought to get on. Mrs. Joyce says so too—she was saying so only the other day."

"I mean to," he answered quietly; smiling a little, I dare say, at my earnest, old-fashioned tone. "I want to shine and make a noise in the world some day, you know; for the dear old father's sake as well as for my own—I want him to be proud of me. But a poor parson's poor son will have to work hard to do it, you bet!"

"Yes," I said thoughtfully. "I—I suppose so."

In my simple ignorance and untried youth, I felt sorry sometimes for Bertie Wilford; pitied him sincerely indeed, with a childish, tender sort of pity, for being of those unlucky ones sent on this earth who were destined to toil for their daily bread. I was very sorry for him, just as I was very sorry for the poor labourers and fishermen who lived in the cottages around us at Thorpe. It was true, of course, that Bertie, being an artist and a gentleman, would not have to dig or plough or go a-fishing, or mind boats on the shore; but all the same, like the labourers and the fishermen, it was plain that in order to live

he would have to labour—yet half the battle for him was already won, because Bertie Wilford was ambitious.

I was only twelve years old at present; whilst Bertie himself was five years older than I—nearly seventeen, in fact—and consequently, I suppose, five years wiser.

"Hebe," he soon exclaimed, "I'm ready now! What do you think of it?"

I looked earnestly then at the drawing in the pocket-book, and, child-like, said exactly what I thought.

"Yes—I am sure it is very clever, Bertie. But how small you have made them, haven't you?"

"Ah, the towers, you mean?"

"Ye-es."

"Why, naturally," explained my companion, being generous enough not to ridicule my ignorance. "In this slight sketch, Hebe dear, from this particular point of view, it is in reality the foreground which makes the picture, as one may say. The distant towers themselves are merely a detail in it; though it was expressly to get them in that I made the picture. Being a goodish way off from this spot, they must, of necessity, appear little more to the eye than a couple of bee-hives, stuck there upon the edge of the shore. Look around you, Hebe, and you will see, that I'm right."

I did look around me, and discerned that it was all as Bertie said. But now it was nearly nine o'clock, and the wide undulating landscape was fast growing dim and indistinct, with a gray-blue haze spreading slowly over the downs and fields behind us, and a misty rose-pink light fading out of the serene western heavens, so lovely always on a fair evening in June.

Yonder, in the soft distance before us, was faintly distinguishable the broken coast line which hid from us in the twilight the mighty ocean, whispering and sighing at the cliffs' rugged base.

But to-night one would not have known that the sea was there at all—I mean so near; for the wind, what little there had been of it all day, had gone down utterly with the sun, and the wavelets now were as still and languid as the lazy ripples of an inland stream.

Bertie put away his sketch-book and pencils, jumped from the fence, and, taking my hand, said,—

"Come along, Hebe. I begin to want my supper; don't you?"

"I began to wait it ever so long ago," I confessed truthfully.

"Well, never mind. Come along now and have it with father and me at the Parsonage—bless you, Mrs. Joyce won't care," said Bertie lightly, as we left the downs to the cattle and the mists, and got on to the steep and dusty roadway which, with many another like it traversing and winding over the breezy hills, brought one ultimately to the village of Thorpe.

"Oh, I mustn't, Bertie, I really mustn't; Mrs. Joyce would indeed be very anxious about me. It wouldn't so much have mattered, you know, if she had been told before we came out," I said, in answer to this genial off-hand invitation. "Besides, I recollect now—Mrs. Joyce said that I might ask you to return home with me. We have a cold chicken for supper, and a raspberry-tart, and strawberries too—such splendid ones, Bertie—that were sent from Castlegrange only this very morning; and—"

"Well, there's only bread-and-cheese at the Parsonage, I fancy," put in Bertie Wilford lightly. "So, thank you, Hebe; I'll come back with you, I think, instead. Mrs. Joyce is awfully kind."

"She is a dear old kind darling, always," I agreed warmly.

My beautiful, unhappy mother, once Doreen Tressillian, of grand and ancient Castlegrange, I had never known; at least, it was impossible for me to remember her; and what motherly love and tenderness had brightened and beatified my somewhat lonely childhood had been found in Mrs. Joyce and in no one else.

For my mother's sake she loved me—she often said so, and cried, too, when she said it. In the sorrowful days of long ago she had been my mother's governess and chaperon at Castlegrange,

just as she was my own governess and guardian now at Thorpe.

"Yes, indeed, she's a brick!" said Bertie, heartily; thus endorsing my own warm opinion of our friend, Mrs. Joyce.

"And when are we to have the picnic under the cliffs, Bertie?" I asked him, as I trotted homeward by his side.

Regularly every summer we had a picnic on the shore; generally in June, though, before the neighbouring sea-side resorts on the Sussex coast became crowded with excursion-loving London folk, and each time the arrangement of the outing was precisely the same, it never varied; that is to say, Mrs. Joyce and our gaunt old maid-servant, Prudence Best, stocked the hamper, and Bertie Wilford contributed his covered-cart. To tell the truth, throughout the summer months the hamper and the covered-cart were frequently in requisition at The Lea; else life for us at Thorpe, I have no doubt, would have been a very humdrum and uneventful business indeed.

"Well, I have been thinking about it," Bertie answered slowly. "How would the day after to-morrow do? I can't go to-morrow, Hebe, you see, because it's my Shoreham day; and Aragon jaws a lot, and goes on no end, whenever I miss running over there. But the day after to-morrow would suit me first-rate."

"I know it would suit us—any day would suit us. And, besides, that would give old Prudence plenty of time to make lots of nice things to take with us. And we shall ride there in the covered-cart as usual; eh, Bertie?"

"Oh, yes, Hebe! We must have the covered-cart, of course."

"I am so glad, Bertie!" I cried, clapping my hands in childish joy.

It was nearly dark when we reached Thorpe; and lights here and there shone out from upper cottage casements. But now and again a shadowy form of labourer, or fisherman, or village gaffer, leaning in the cool of the evening over his garden gate, and recognising Bertie and me in the summer darkness, would wish us a lusty good-night. For we knew everybody, and everybody knew us.

The Parsonage was at one end of our straggling village; and The Lea, or Lea Cottage, as it was sometimes called, my home, at the other.

Somewhat to our surprise, we discerned Mrs. Joyce standing in the road—a rather stout gray figure in the gray-blue gloaming—evidently watching for me and Bertie Wilford.

The wicket under the elms in the low stone wall was open, as was also the hall-door sheltered by its creeper-laden porch at the end of the garden path.

And the dining-room window was open too; and we could see the white table-cloth spread for supper, with a bowl of fresh flowers in the midst, and the wax-candles burning palely in the tall silver candlesticks.

The home which Mr. Tressillian provided for Mrs. Joyce and her young charge was in every respect a refined and a comfortable, though by no means a large one; and very happy and contented were we, she and I, together in it.

Yet how little had I dreamed on that lovely June day how soon the pretty snug home at Thorpe was to be broken up!

Bertie took off his broad-brimmed straw hat with the red ribbon he always wore on it, and shook back his yellow hair. It felt quite close and sultry in the village among the downs, after the more open spaces by the sea we had left behind us.

"Hebe brought me back, Mrs. Joyce," Bertie said, in his bright boyish way; "and I am sure you will think that I'm always here at The Lea! How are you? I wanted to take her home to the Parsonage to supper; but—but," laughing and flushing a little, "you see here am I come to you again, instead."

"We expected you," said Mrs. Joyce, with a sort of dazed air that was very strange; "and supper is waiting, Bertie dear. But I'm afraid you are later than you ought to be, you and Hebe, aren't you? However, come in now, both of you. Dear me, I'm so flurried! I declare I hardly know what I am about! The truth of the matter is, I've—I've heard from Mr. Tressil-

lian. I have, dears. The letter arrived this evening, an hour or so ago; and I've been in a kind of whirl, as you may say, ever since! Children, what do you think? He is coming here, actually coming here—himself!"

Bertie and I only stared. We did not speak. "Just imagine it, dears, for yourselves!" went on Mrs. Joyce, in what for her was high excitement—"the first time in eleven years! Eleven years next October it will be since we first came here to Thorpe. How time flies! I—I—there, Bertie and Hebe, I feel dreadfully worried and upset, and that's the fact! I never could stand these sudden shocks—never—and if it had been a telegram instead of a letter, I believe I should have died outright!"

"But what on earth is he coming for? What in the world does he want? Eh, Mrs. Joyce?" questioned Bertie Wilford rapidly, at last. "Things here are going on all right, ain't they? There is nothing whatever to be alarmed or frightened about, surely?"

"Oh, I am sure I don't know—I mean, I suppose that everything is all right! Why shouldn't it be, Bertie, dear? At any rate, I have always done my best; and Mr. Tressillian cannot, with truth, say that I have not. But—but he seems to think—oh, my poor forehead!—that it is now time that he and Hebe should become better known to each other—you see, in reality they are just like strangers; he has been so much abroad at one time or another. 'As you are aware,' he says, 'I regard Hebe Fairburn as my ward—indeed in the light of a sacred trust. It is time that we met and spoke of her future welfare. Her lot in life is no common one. Duty therefore brings me to Thorpe.' My dears, those are his very words. They sound cold and stiff and unpromising, to my fancy," sighed Mrs. Joyce, a sigh that ended in a gasp; "though I—I suppose they are meant to be kind."

"His duty! Eleven years! Not a bad while to think about it, I must say, whether he has been much abroad or not," grumbled Bertie aloud, as we all three strolled indoors together.

The drift of his thoughts and his meaning was not exactly clear to me, perhaps; still it was plain that in some way or other Bertie Wilford was dissatisfied.

## CHAPTER II.

YET, after all, our supper at The Lea that evening was by no means a dismal meal.

Far from it. With a wing and merry-thought of a chicken, and a couple of glasses of claret—Castlegrange claret—Mrs. Joyce's spirits revived in a really wonderful manner; and her mild blue eyes by degrees lost the expression of fear and anxiety which had rushed into them for awhile on the receipt of Julian Tressillian's letter.

In her earlier experience, before her Castlegrange days, she had known the sorrows of life in no slight measure; and at Castlegrange she had shared and sympathised with the manifold sorrows of other people.

A mother herself, and the easiest creature upon earth to live with, she was essentially a motherly woman; of a temperament curiously contented and unembittered, considering how hardly the world had once used her.

She was fifty-six years old, I believe, and her thin, sandy hair had long since been mixed with gray; but she wore no cap of any kind to hide time's handiwork, brushing the hair carefully from her smooth pink forehead and twisting it round a tortoise-shell comb at the back of her head.

Her only son, as his father before him had been, was a sailor in the merchant service; and his letters, written from many a distant land to his mother at home, were ever the chief delight of Mrs. Joyce's life.

"I cannot complain," she would say sometimes with a vaguely deprecating smile, "for Mr. Tressillian has been very kind, always very kind; and I have a son of my own who is indeed the best of sons. 'Tis true I was left a widow at twenty-five, totally unprovided for; but thanks to the



good education which my wise parents gave me, I have been able ever since to hold my own in the battle of life. If I had not been a woman of sundry accomplishments, Hebe darling," said she quite simply to me one day when the desultory retrospective mood was upon her, more strongly, perhaps, than usual, "I never should have been able to go to Castlegrange as finishing governess and chaperon to old Mr. Tressillian's motherless twin-daughters, Doris and Doreen; that is, dear, of course, your own poor dear beautiful mother, and—her equally beautiful twin-sister, your Aunt Doris. Ah me! Hebe, child, how the years fly!"

It never seemed to occur to Mrs. Joyce that Julian Tressillian himself might object strenuously to this free talk of the past and Castlegrange—the gloomy story of suffering and wrong-doing there; at all events, with me, the child Hebe Fairburn, as an eager, open-eared listener to it all! But I suppose she knew how much she might or might not say, how far she dared or dared not go in her confidences, concerning the tragedy of those unhappy twin-daughters of the house, Doris and Doreen, who were at rest together now, who in death had found peace and oblivion—a cessation at last of the weariness and strife which had wrecked their severed lives!

"And when is Mr. Tressillian coming? You haven't told us that yet, Mrs. Joyce," said Bertie, who was making short work of the raspberry-jam tart, with an eye on the strawberries and cream to follow; "because the day after tomorrow, you know, we want to have our picnic on the shore. If we put it off any later the cheap-trippers will be swarming all over the place; and there will be no getting there at all then—at least, with any decent comfort. When do you expect Mr. Tressillian, eh?" mumbled Bertie again with his mouth full.

Mrs. Joyce had started; looked almost guilty indeed; and the petals of an over-blown rose, which she had fastened head downward in her brooch, parted and fell in a shower and were scattered on her bosom and lap.

"Oh—er—not this week, Bertie, I think he says."

She took the letter from her pocket and referred to it to refresh her memory; but she did not offer to show Julian Tressillian's letter either to Bertie Wilford or to me. Yet she had often showed us the letters of her sailor son.

"H'm—h'm—h'm. No, I thought not. About the beginning of next week, he says. He has business at Sandfield, it appears; and will come on to us at Thorpe from there."

"He has property in Sandfield—houses and things—hasn't he?" said Bertie, in his careless way. "Lucky chap!"

"Yes, a good deal of property, I fancy, of one sort and another; and, of course, here in Thorpe as well, Bertie dear. This house—The Lea, or Lea Cottage—is his, as you know; and that is how we came to occupy it, Hebe and I," Mrs. Joyce explained, hurriedly, beginning to look nervous and fearful again, though her lips were still apart in the amiable, meaningless smile that was peculiar to her.

"And why the dickens his agent or solicitor couldn't have come down and seen after it this year, as he has come down about it every year before up till now, I can't conceive—whatever the matter in hand may be! As for that tall talk of his about 'his duty to his ward, Hebe Fairburn,' why, in my opinion, that's all bosh, Mrs. Joyce! There's something in the background, depend upon it," said Bertie, with a lordly you-can't-deceive-me sort of air.

Mrs. Joyce sighed and shivered a little. The rose at her smooth plump throat was entirely dissipated now, and only the green stalk and leaves of it were left still fastened there by her brooch-pin.

"You forget, Bertie," she said, gently, "that by birth Mr. Tressillian is a Sussex man. He was born in this neighbourhood—not far from Shoreham, I think—and was a young man of property hereabout before he became a great landowner in Westshire. Of course he may be coming down for once in a way to—to look up old friends and acquaintances, you know. One cannot tell."

"Ugh!" said Bertie, curdly and sceptically, helping himself to cheese, "he may, of course."

"I think it was very hard, and wrong, and unkind, and—unnatural of Mr. Tressillian; yes I do!" I said, speaking up precociously, having listened attentively to this brief dialogue which had been going on in my hearing, "to take Castlegrange away from my mother and Aunt Doris and therefore away from me too! If he had already got houses and land of his own in Sussex, what did he want houses and land in Westshire as well for? It was greedy and mean, and I—and I call him a—a usurper!" I said, remembering the frequency and significance of the word as applied to wicked kings in the history books.

"Hush, Hebe dearest; you don't know what you are talking about," reproved Mrs. Joyce mildly. "You are not yet old enough to understand these things aright—"

"Or the strict and straightforward justice of the law of entail," put in Bertie, laughing noisily.

"Bravo, Hebe! Your opinion of the case is precisely my own. If I were in your shoes I, too, should be inclined to call Mr. Julian Tressillian a usurper, and perhaps something a trifle harder. Entail be hanged! 'Tisn't fair! However, look here, Mrs. Joyce, how about the picnic on Thursday?" Bertie rose, pushed back his chair, pulling out his watch by its silver chain as he did so. "By Jove! half-past ten! I must be off, or daddy will be tired sitting up for me. But, come! let us settle about our picnic before I go."

"For Thursday, did you say, Bertie? Well, I don't know, I am sure," said Mrs. Joyce, hesitating feebly; because, I suppose, she thought that she ought not, for example's sake, to seem too ready always to put aside lessons and school-books for a jaunt over the downs in the covered cart; which, by the way, both Bertie and I knew she enjoyed as thoroughly as we did ourselves. In fact, we all three of us dearly loved an outing with a well-filled hamper and the covered cart.

"Yes, Thursday. To-morrow's my day with Aragon—I can't miss that—but why not Thursday? If the ogre is not due here in our midst until next week, we may as well look alive and kick up our heels and enjoy ourselves whilst we can! Who knows? it may be our last chance of a frolic—his blighting presence may destroy everything!" said Bertie lightly, with a shrug, catching up his straw hat which he had tossed on the sideboard on coming in.

Mrs. Joyce's florid complexion paled a shade or two, I thought.

"Oh, yes," said she hastily, "I see no reason why we should not go, Bertie, dear. I hope it will be fine."

"All right, then," were Bertie Wilford's cheery last words. "I will call with the cart on Thursday morning at eleven—sharp! Mind you're ready!"

We had accompanied him down the garden path to the wicket in the low flint wall, where the ghostly white beady-eyed moths were fluttering audibly among the elms, and watched his tall lithe figure disappear into the misty star-lit grassiness of the summer night.

Dew was heavy on lawn and flower-bed; leaves and blossoms alike bent beneath it; and the hoarse whisper of the near sea came to us distinctly, with a whiff of its fine salt breath, across the billowy downs where the cattle lay. A night wind, blowing inland, was rising; the tide was on the turn.

On re-entering the house, Mrs. Joyce sent me at once to bed, saying, as she pressed me affectionately to her bosom:

"Good-night, my pet; you are looking a little tired and pale. I am afraid, Hebe, I let you sit up too late."

And then she went straightway to the kitchen, where gaunt old Prudence Best was raking out the embers and making all safe for the night, and told that ancient and privileged handmaiden—who, like Mrs. Joyce herself, eleven years back, had accompanied me to Thorpe from Castlegrange—that she must get up early in the morning and make plenty of nice things to pack the hamper with; for we should want it to be ready by eleven o'clock on Thursday.

"What! a-gadding off ages, then, are you mum?" I heard old Prudence exclaim as I was going upstairs; and she added a moment afterwards, though I myself, at any rate, was too young and unsuspicious to detect the gruff irony that lurked in the speech:

"Ah, well, Mrs. Joyce, mum, they do say that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy; and the same rule o' wisdom and understanding, I 'specs, means little Jills too, along o' the little Jacks—eh mum?"

"Quite true, Prudence," Mrs. Joyce answered innocently; "and you must admit that there's nothing like plenty of fresh air and exercise for young growing children. Good-night, Prudence. Oh, by the bye, I have not told you the news yet—I mustn't forget. Mr. Tressillian is—*is* coming, to Thorpe next week."

"Lord alive O!" ejaculated Prudence Best, as she let the kitchen poker fall crashing into the fender. "What on hearth does he want—"

I heard no more. I was in my bed-room then, and shut the door. Airy, wholesome, and pretty as a picture as was my pink-and-white bed-chamber at Lea Cottage, with its neat little curtainless bedstead of gleaming brass, I somehow, try how I would, could not close my eyes in sleep that night—which to me, indeed, was a new experience passing strange.

No—to-night I could only lie awake; and think; and stare at the tremulous creeper-shadows so faintly and finely limned upon the window-blind. Sleep seemed an impossibility.

It was the coming of Mr. Tressillian that filled and perturbed my thoughts; for, stranger in every wise as he was to me, Hebe Fairburn, I had nevertheless a vague intuitive conviction that his coming to Thorpe meant trouble and change—an innovation in our quiet lives which indeed no one of us was prepared for or desired.

I tried to think of the Martello towers, and the bursting hamper, and the delightful jolting three and a half miles' ride across the downs and the pasture-lands in Bertie's covered cart; but it would not do; it was of no use; Mr. Tressillian's unexpected visit drove everything save himself clean out of my head.

I could think only of him.

Somehow I had never thought to inquire of Mrs. Joyce what he was like—in person, I mean; and somehow—never, I suppose, having been asked for a description of Julian Tressillian's outward form—she had never told me. However, I was an imaginative child, and I seemed to know quite well.

In fact, Bertie Wilford and I between us had long ago settled that Mr. Tressillian was "Byronic"—any way that was Bertie's word for him, if it was not mine.

"Julian Tressillian!" Bertie exclaimed, "why, Hebe, the very name of itself describes and fits the man, as you might say! I wouldn't mind betting you anything you like that in appearance he is a regular 'Corsair,' or 'Gaiour,' or 'Maufréd,' or perhaps a stern, melancholy 'Lara.'"

'There was a laughing devil in his snar,  
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;  
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,  
Hope withering fled, and Mercy sighed farewell!'

quoted Bertie, theatrically.

But I knew nothing myself of these sombre poetry heroes; since Mrs. Joyce had once said, though certainly in a wavering sort of way, that I must not read Byron just yet, even if Bertie did. He was scarcely the right poet, she thought, for very young girls; and very young men, too, she was inclined to believe, would be all the better for leaving him alone on the book-shelf until they were older. All the same, she smiled indulgently when she told Bertie this; and he smiled also, and nodded back at her, and answered carelessly, "It was likely enough that they would—he fancied that he had heard the same thing, or something like it, before."

In my young mind's eye, notwithstanding, I saw a tall, strongly-built gentleman, no longer young, but graceful as a prince in a fairy-story, all the same; ivory-pale in feature and very handsome; with dark hair and deep dark eyes, with perhaps a lurid light in them, and a drooping silken moustache, black as midnight, hiding a

beautiful sorrowful mouth, which yet could be stern and pitiless enough when it chose!

For had not Mrs. Joyce let slip one day that I had in my babyhood—when scarcely a twelve-month old, indeed—been banished from Castlegrange, because Mr. Tressillian could not endure either the sight or the sound of me—could not bear, in fact, to have me anywhere near him at the house, the mere knowledge of my existence therein reminding him too painfully of my dead mother, Doreen, whom he had so deeply and withal so vainly loved?

Big and rambling as the great old mansion in Westshire was, with attics and vaults and remote disused chambers, and though by rights the venerable building should have belonged to me and not to him—for so I reasoned in my childish ignorance—forth from the old house he had sent us, Mrs. Joyce and me, almost like Hagar and Ishmael, said she plaintively, exiled by Abraham into the wilderness of Boerabeba of yore. Only we had gone forth into banishment armed and sustained with more generous provision than the biblical bread and bottle of water of poor Hagar and her charge—accompanied, moreover, by a skilled nurse and housekeeper in the person of Prudence Best, who in her younger days had nursed my mother and Aunt Doris. And thus it was that we had journeyed directly and comfortably to a snug little home far away down in Sussex; where everything was abundant and nothing barren; where rent and taxes never troubled us; and fat cheques came regularly—with manifold other good things—from Mr. Julian Tressillian of Castlegrange.

For eleven happy, humdrum years had Lea Cottage been my home; I could remember no other—I desired no other—with yellow-haired Bertie Wilford for a bright companion and play-fellow, and dear soft-hearted, indulgent Mrs. Joyce for a motherly guardian, governess and friend.

And now what was going to happen—what cloud was looming ahead!

Julian Tressillian was at last coming to Thorpe, and something disagreeable, something destructive to our tranquil mode of life, would be the sure result, I knew.

I was certain of it. And I also knew instinctively that Mrs. Joyce herself was certain of it too.

What was going to happen!—anything bad—anything very dreadful? I began to grow drowsy at length wondering and wondering over the same question, to which I could find no satisfactory answer. The house was so still—so still—when at this point in my troubled cogitations my bedroom-door was opened cautiously, and I heard the bracket clock on the landing strike twelve.

A white familiar figure entered, with a green plaid shawl thrown round its shoulders, and moved noiselessly in the dim halo of the night-light towards the bed head. I started up.

"I thought it was just possible that you might be awake, Hebe, darling," Mrs. Joyce said, in a very low tone. If perchance I was asleep, she would not disturb me for the world.

"Yes, I am awake, Mrs. Joyce dear, wide awake now. I have been thinking about Mr. Tressillian."

"Ah! Hebe, dear, so have I."

She leant over my pillow, stroked my roughened curly red locks, and kissed me in a lingering, harassed sort of fashion. Her cheeks, I found then, were quite wet with tears.

"Why, Mrs. Joyce, you have been crying, I declare—actually crying!" I exclaimed, very much concerned at the discovery.

"Only a little, dear—a few tears, that is all! Hebe darling, it has—I don't know why—it has occurred to me that—that perhaps Mr. Tressillian will say when he comes that I have failed in my duty towards you. He may feel dissatisfied, perhaps—displeased—about something or other. He has singular notions—odd ways of looking at things occasionally—kind as he is. He may—Hebe," she broke off anxiously, "you don't think that I have failed in my duty, in any way, do you, dear? Tell me, Hebe, darling."

I flung my young arms around her plump soft neck, and drew her head downward still closer to mine.

"I am sure that you have not, you sweet kind good-natured darling old duck! Nobody in the world could have been kinder or more good-natured than you are—always, always! You are never cross or nasty with anybody, and you never say 'No' to anything. If Mr. Tressillian says any such wicked, unjust things when he comes here next week to see us, why, I will tell him to his face that they are not true. I am not a bit afraid of him. So don't cry, Mrs. Joyce—I will stand up for you and take your part I—I—"

Mrs. Joyce gently freed herself from my tight warm clasp, and stopped me with another kiss; shivering a little as she drew the plaid shawl more closely around her shoulders.

"Good night, dearest child," she whispered. "Don't lie awake any longer if you can help it. It isn't good for you, you know. Forget all about Mr. Tressillian for the present; and now, darling, go to sleep as quickly as you can!"

Then she went out as mysteriously as she had entered, and the house once more became as silent as the grave. It was really very odd, I thought. What did Mrs. Joyce mean?

She seemed—yes, frightened, actually frightened about something or other!

What could it be!

(To be continued.)

## THE RECTOR.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

As the sun sank behind the housetops and the last patch of smoke-dimmed crimson gave place to the dingy darkness which Londoners call twilight, a tall Italian walked silently, and with the peculiar stealthiness of a cat down an old-fashioned street in Chelsea.

He stopped at the middle of the street and, shivering slightly with the cold, although an Englishman would have called the day warm, gazed up and down, before entering a low-browed public-house, which, being within sight of the river, had been dubbed the "Waterman's Arms."

Behind the little bar, which was scrupulously clean, a young girl fluttered about—not serving, because, excepting the Italian, there was no one to serve.

In her bright blue dress, upon the neck of which fell a shower of black hair, she looked pretty and enticing in the extreme, and Spazzola, a true Italian in the admiration of the beautiful, having nothing better to do, engaged in a little chit-chat commencing by establishing himself in a comfortable attitude and remarking that there were not many customers.

"No," said the girl, "not in the afternoon. We get them in the evening when the watermen and lightermen come off."

"Come off where?" asked the Italian, with his foreign accent and puzzled raising of the eyebrows.

"The river of course," replied the girl.

"Ah, soh!" assented the Italian. "And do not the gentlemen, the—what do you call them?—the nobles, come and play their dominoes—eh?"

"Nobles! Bless me, no," said the girl, laughing. "There are no nobles down here, and not many gentlemen either. Leastways," she added, "we don't see them here."

The Italian looked puzzled.

"Have you no gentlemen who see it here of an evening for a little *conversazione*?"

"We don't sell it if they did," said the girl; but, glancing from the puzzled expression of Spazzola's face that she had misunderstood him, she caught at his meaning and added,—

"Oh, I know. No. Most of the people about here never go out. They're a most unsociable lot. Why, I've known a gentleman as has been lodg'd in the street for ten months, and he ain't been inside the doors, although he always passes after dark."

"After dark!" repeated the Italian, greatly

interested in an individual who possessed a habit so particularly his own. "Does he not walk out in the day?"

"No, never," replied the girl, "and when he does go out at night he is wrapped up to such an extent, you can't see more than the tip of his nose and his black hair, which is so long it falls about the collar of his cloak—the cloak is a beastly thing, just like a foreigners, I should say he was an Italian."

"Italian!" repeated Spazzola. "Ees that so? A countryman of mine! I am Italian," he ejaculated, striking his breast. "Where does he live, *la mia figlia*?"

"There in the top room of that house," she replied, pointing to the top window of an old-fashioned house across the street. "He lives there all day, doing something—working I suppose—and comes out like a bat or an owl at night," and she laughed at the comparison.

"It is strange," said the Italian, his dark eyes fixed on the ground thoughtfully. "I think I will go and speak with my countryman. What say you? Is he amiable, polite, a *bon camarade*?"

"I should say not," said the barmaid. "From all I have heard I should think he is a regular crusty old fellow. But why don't you go and see for yourself? He may be glad to see a countryman if he is an Italian."

"I weel," said the Italian. "I wish you good-day, signora. The spot is charming, your beer is superb. Ah, me!"

With these last words he stepped through the doorway, and looking cautiously round him, walked slowly up to the house the girl had pointed out to him.

While he was lounging softly past, meditating upon the mode in which he should effect an entry, the door opened and a servant ran across the street to a chandler's shop, leaving the door ajar.

With a mental blessing on the propitious Fates, Spazzola, with a speed and noiselessness of a snake, darted into the passage, and, listening for one moment at the foot of the stairs, walked up.

As he neared the top landing, the Italian's footsteps became almost noiseless, and, bending forward, he stole up the stairs like a cat, his hand instinctively grasping the handle of the stiletto beneath his cloak.

"This must be it," he muttered, and stooped down at the keyhole of the door. "Almost dark. Can see no one. I will knock. Courage, Spazzola; this may lead to business." And he knocked softly at the door.

No answer.

He waited for two minutes and knocked again, this time louder.

Still no answer.

Then he listened breathlessly, and, hearing nothing, tried the handle of the door.

It was locked.

"Soh!" he muttered, "my sweet child was wrong for once. This owl does fly by day. I am curious. It is a mere plaything, this lock. Pah! We will for amusement—mark me, only amusement—take one peep at the owl's nest."

With a smile that lit up his face like a flash of sunlight and showed his glittering teeth, he took from his pocket a small steel instrument, inserted it in the keyhole, turned it with a peculiar twist of the hand, and opened the door.

An exclamation of astonishment burst from his lips as the interior of the room met his view. Beside the plain table and chair, piece of square carpet, and poverty-stricken aspect, the room, though utterly devoid of anything approaching comfort in the way of furniture, was filled in one corner with an easel, upon which shone the commencement of what promised to be a superb study of an old country house. On the walls glistened a number of unframed pictures, women's heads, bits of landscape, a scene from one of Racine's plays, a scrap of forest foliage, and the portrait of a superb mastiff, all bearing about them the evidence of a master-hand, which the Italian, no mean critic, detected at a glance.

On the plain deal table, lying beside palettes and brushes, was a cup of water and a crust of bread.

Taking off his hat with an air of profound respect, Spazzola entered.



"It is superb," he murmured, "superb! I have found a Carlo Dolci, a Titian, a Rubens, a—St. Peter! What colours! what forms! It is magnificent. Spazzola, thou art in a great man's studio!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

LADY MILDRED and the young ladies found Chudleigh Chichester in one of the narrow avenues of flowers in the impromptu place of exhibition, the schoolroom.

The place was crowded with the villagers and farm labourers, Hodge staring with grinning admiration at the rows of dazzling nature-jewels, and the small tradesman and servants flocking to and fro amidst a storm of delighted expressions.

At the farther end of the room stood Sir Fielding, Mrs. Gregson and Mr. Gregson, chatting affably and examining a splendid specimen of amber rose.

Chudleigh, surrounded by an affectionately respectful group of adoring tenants, was admiring a fine specimen of an English juvenile as the ladies approached him, and looked up with a start and a pleased smile as he recognised the stately figure of Carlotta.

Soon after, by some means or other—probably not unaided by Maud—he managed to separate Carlotta from the throng and inveigle her under the pretence of inspecting a fine tulip into an almost deserted corner.

"All this must have given you a great deal of trouble," said Carlotta, as they walked on.

"Not much," said Chudleigh. "It was quickly arranged, and Maud has been a valuable help. I would not mind undergoing twice the trouble to give these simple souls the pleasure they are evidently taking in the affair."

Carlotta glanced at him—he was looking another way—with a sudden light in her eyes that made them look more beautiful because more tender and eloquent, but she said, coldly enough,—

"They look pleased, so you have your reward. That is a fine specimen. Who exhibits it?"

"That is from the workhouse at Annsleigh. An old pauper brought it over this morning and asked if it might be put amongst the others. It was placed—while he waited—beside those from the Folly and Hall. He was delighted."

"It is a very fine one, is it not?" said Carlotta.

"Capital," said Chudleigh.

"Are you going to give it a prize?"

"No, we cannot. There are better ones in the room, and we are playing fairly, you know."

"Would you let me give a prize for those two then?" said Carlotta, with a sudden change from her old manner to a hesitating, almost humble one.

"Let you!" said Chudleigh, eagerly. "Of course, Miss Lawley, and very grateful that you should take such interest in us."

"Thank you," said Carlotta. "Let us go to Lady Mildred," she added, quietly, before he could speak, and he bowed in silence and led her on.

Lady Mildred, surrounded by the "committee," as Chudleigh had termed the Gregsons and Sir Fielding, was going over the various names of the exhibitors to whom Sir Fielding and Mr. Gregson had decided prizes were meritoriously due.

"Oh, do come here, Chud," said she; "I'm feeling so confused, and your father cannot, or will not, help me at all. Tell me how you pronounce that word—it's Latin, and I can't get hold of it. Sir Fielding has told me three times, but laughed so that I could not hear him."

Chudleigh stooped down to spell over the Latin noun and Carlotta glided from his side to Sir Fielding, who welcomed her with a genial smile, and commenced scolding her for not coming over to the Hall.

Then Maud came up, followed by the faithful Tom, who walked behind, watching the crowd with bewildered air, and wondering within his mind how the people could possibly pay so much attention to the poor patches of blossom and leaf

when the most glorious flower in the whole world was walking in their midst.

Presently Lady Mildred came forward with the list in her hand and proceeded to distribute the prizes, which consisted of money for the poorer class and gifts of books and useful articles for the higher grade of contributors.

Then Chudleigh marshalled his people out, and returned to Sir Fielding, who immediately commissioned him to invite the Gregsons to dine at the Hall, which Lady Mildred and Carlotta had already promised him to do.

The dinner was a very pleasant, almost a merry one, for the Gregson element introduced a great deal of laughter, which Lady Mildred's genial yet thoroughbred manner nicely toned down.

Old Mr. Gregson engaged Sir Fielding in a political argument, but of so mild a nature that it did not create more attention than was its due though he once or twice emphasised an assertion by banging his delicate wine-glass on the table.

Maud joined in the conversation going on around and bent her beautiful smile and attentive ear to her next neighbour—of course, Mr. Tom—with her usual gentleness, but a keen observer would have discovered that many of the bashful young man's speeches were unheard by her, and that her smile served but to hide a wistful, almost sad expression.

At the end of the table Carlotta Lawley was seated next Chudleigh, who ministered to her every want and seemed to supply every wish before it was expressed.

"I have a new picture to show you in the gallery," said he to her as the ladies rose. "Would you like to look at it? It is by an unknown artist—by unknown I mean undiscovered."

Carlotta, whose love for art was always at passion heat, answered at once,—

"A new picture? I should be delighted!"

"Very well, I shall search for you beside the piano in the drawing-room, and bear you off," and her eyes lit up as he held the door for her.

On entering the drawing-room, Chudleigh went straight to Carlotta and reminded her of her promise to come and see the new picture.

"Do you remember when we were in here last?" said Chudleigh, dropping his voice almost to a whisper as they trod the polished oak of the gallery.

"Yes," replied Carlotta, "and the trouble you were kind enough to take in explaining the pictures to me."

"I didn't wish to recall that," said Chudleigh. "Trouble! I should be almost angry with you for using the word only—"

"Where is the picture?" interrupted Carlotta, with hurried eagerness, walking unconsciously faster in her anxiety to stop him.

"This is it."

Carlotta bent down and looked at the picture for some minutes in silence, at first with an interest caused by its beauty, then, suddenly, with an exclamation of surprise and a keener gaze. Looking up, she said,—

"Do you know the artist?"

"No," he said. "Nor can we find out. Do you?"

"No," she replied, "but I have seen the picture before and several others painted by the same hand. They are masterpieces. This hue—that piece of colouring there—could only be painted by one hand—the hand that drew 'Cleopatra' which filled Florence with admiration, and the piece of seascape—that which the Prince purchased—you know the picture I mean?"

"Yes," said Chudleigh, with surprise; then, with a look of admiration, "And are you sure this is by the same man?"

"I think I am certain," replied Carlotta.

Chudleigh muttered something and the beautiful woman looked up.

"What did you say?"

"You will be angry, perhaps, if I tell you," said Chudleigh.

She shook her head.

"I was marvelling at your knowledge," he said. "Every day you astonish me by unconsciously showing how immeasurably more clever you are than the rest of womankind," and he sighed.

Carlotta smiled.

"That is flattery," she said. "You should

learn to wrap your compliments in silver tissue or you will not even get the vainest to accept them as true metal."

"It was no compliment," he said, with simple gravity, fixing his great, earnest eyes on her face. "Then you should not have said it," she retorted.

"You promised you would not be angry!" he said.

"Nor am I," she replied, raising her eyes to his with another flash of light that sent the blood, already exceedingly excited, racing through his veins.

"You tell me I should not have said it," he murmured. "Must I always remain dumb in your presence? I do almost, for I fear to say a word lest it should anger you. Miss Lawley, I have fancied that you are unusually cold to me—not unkind, that you cannot be, but reserved and—"

Oh, Carlotta, I must speak out. Why do you treat me as if I had done you some wrong, as if I must be kept at a distance? You shun me while you are gracious to others, who cannot reverence you more than I do! Tell me how I, who love the very ground on which you tread, have merited your dislike—I had almost said disdain! Tell me why. Ah, Carlotta, don't look so coldly at me. If you knew how I have loved you since the night I came and found you seated like an angel at my father's side, if you knew the passion that fills me night and day with but one thought—one longing for you!"

Flashing like a burst of sunlight, he caught her arm and drew her towards him.

She looked at him for an instant with the old cold look, then turned white, her lips quivering and her eyes filling with tears.

His heart leapt as his eyes read those signs of her emotion, and he uttered a low cry of joy which died on his lips, as with a great effort she drew herself from his grasp, and, turning her head aside, said, sadly,—

"Don't say a word more. It cannot be!"

"Cannot be?" he cried, in a low, thrilling voice. "It is! How can I help loving you? I must!—It cannot be!" Oh, Carlotta, tell me why?"

Though the agony that trembled in his voice pierced her heart, she remained motionless and silent.

He drew himself up for a moment, then looked on the ground; suddenly he started, and taking her hand, said,—

"Carlotta, for Heaven's sake tell me at once if I am wrong. You know—you have heard of our misfortune. You know that my father is ruined, that I am a beggar! Oh, Heaven, I had forgotten it!" and he hid his face in his hands.

She turned towards him with a sudden gesture, but recovered herself and stood silent.

The great Hall clock chimed the hour.

He waited until its last stroke had died away, then with averted face held out his arm. She took it, and the quiver that ran through him at her touch scattered her calm to the winds.

Catching at his arm, she cried almost hoarsely,—

"Listen Chudleigh! Before you judge me hear my story and my confession. I love you!—Stop, not a word! Do not touch me. I owe it you, for I shall nearly break your heart—my own is breaking. I have sworn to marry a rich man—you are ruined now. Don't shrink; you would pity, not scorn me, if you knew the story of the years that led me to register that vow."

Chudleigh, from a child I have lived, eaten, slept with poverty—poverty in its worst form, poverty clad in dishonour, tricked out in deceit. My father was a poor man, who lived one continual falsehood, a schemer for daily bread, he lived one long life of plotting misery, driven here and there by grim poverty, scheming—oh, Chudleigh!—cheating for the dross that makes the world; and I was with him, always an accomplice in his schemes a tool in his knavish hand. My life has been a torture. I have known what it is to be scorned as an adventurer and a thief! Chudleigh, from childhood up till now I have walked the road which only genteel poverty knows, barefooted and in misery, and I have sworn to leave the path for ever so soon as one comes forward to take me by

the hand. I will never be a poor man's wife. I have sworn it, and I will keep my vow."

Chudleigh stood looking at her, grasping her meaning with a clearness that tortured his heart almost beyond bearing. Then when she had finished he raised his eyes with a dumb, piteous agony, and said,—

"You will not break your vow, but you will break my heart!"

## CHAPTER XV.

THE next morning Chudleigh came down to breakfast looking rather pale and out of sorts, with two heavy black marks under his eyes.

"You look unwell, Chud, dear," said Maud, as he bent to kiss her forehead. "Have you a headache?"

"Yes," said Chudleigh carelessly—"been awake all night."

"You must have some tea," said Maud, ringing for it, "and go and lay down afterwards."

"I'll have the tea, but not the sofa, Maud," he said. "I have to ride over to Woodfells, about the timber on the four-acre, and, by the way, I promised the steward I would check that file of accounts this morning," and he stifled a weary sigh.

"Poor Chud!" said Maud, leaning over his shoulder, and pressing her white hand against his brow. "You work as hard as a banker's clerk. Can't you stay at home and rest for one day?"

Chudleigh shook his head.

"No, Maudie, my child. The estate is a large one you know, and requires looking after. How do you think the flower-show went off yesterday?"

"Oh, delightful, Chud," she replied; "the people seemed pleased beyond expression. I believe any one of them would do anything for you. I always thought they harboured a kind feeling for me, but I think they really idolise you. Carlotta said last night that she heard your name on their lips as she passed every group."

Chudleigh raised his cup as she pronounced Carlotta's name and winced.

"The papers, sir," said a footman, entering and laying the day's news on the table.

Glad of a shield and screen, Chudleigh caught up the *Times* and commenced skimming its contents.

"Let me see, where is papa's *Standard*?" said Maud, turning the pile over. "Ah! here it is. I must air it for him. I wonder what makes him so late."

"Maud," interrupted Chudleigh, with an agitation perfectly inexplicable to his sister, "Lord Crownbrilliant died yesterday morning—"

"Lord Crownbrilliant!" repeated Maud.

"Yes, Mr. Hartfield's father. He, Mr. Hartfield, has the title now."

She looked at him, and in his despairing face and trembling tones, with her quick love, saw, like a flash of light, the hidden cause.

Stretching out her hand until it clasped his as it lay on the table, she whispered, tenderly,—

"What have you to fear, Chudleigh?"

"Everything," he said, dropping his head on his breast and turning his face from her. "Everything. I have lost the race, Maud—lost Carlotta!"

With a tender-hearted cry she raised her hand to his lips, murmuring,—

"Poor Chud—poor Chud!"

In three weeks' time Lord Crownbrilliant came down to Grassmere.

Dressed in black, with mourning jewellery set with diamonds, and followed by a retinue of servants. He took up his quarters at the inn, the best rooms of which had been specially prepared for him.

The Gregsons had sent him a pressing invitation to the Folly, but his lordship courteously refused, saying that he should take up his quarters at the inn, as he should be compelled to run up and down to town, and grant interviews to a host of business men, who would be a nuisance at the Folly.

So that the Gregsons had to be consoled with the reflection that the inn was only ten minutes'

walk from their garden, and his lordship's promise to dine and stay with them as often as he possibly could.

For the first two days Lord Crownbrilliant remained in his rooms, but on the third he rode into the village across the heath and swooped down upon the Folly.

Of course he was very tenderly treated and commiserated, although he looked anything but a mourner, and after the first few minutes laughed with his old soft enjoyment.

Walking round the garden with the Misses Gregson, he said,—

"I'm looking out for a little shooting-box down here. Do you know of any, Miss Lavinia?"

Miss Lavinia's heart beat fast, and the blood coloured her cheek.

"I—I don't know," she said. "Papa might, or Tom, I don't think there is anything in Grassmere."

"No," said Miss Bella. "There are several places to be sold in Annsleigh, though. I will ask papa."

Whereupon she ran up to Mr. Gregson, who was abroad, growling at the gardener.

"What sort of a place do you want, Mr. Hart—my lord?" asked Mr. Gregson, touching the title reverentially. "There's a pretty place on the Annsleigh road, the Retreat—don't know whether you have ever seen it."

"The Wetweat!" said Lord Crownbrilliant.

"Let me recollect! The Wetweat—oh, ah! yes, I remember. Pwetty little box behind some twees. Good stables, conserwatawies, lawns and that sort of thing."

"Yes, that's the place, no doubt," said Mr. Gregson. "It used to belong to an old sea captain, who having plenty of money made it quite a handsome house. It's not so large as the Folly," added the Folly's owner, glancing up at the monstrosity with an air of pride.

"Don't want it so large," said Lord Crownbrilliant. "I want a cigar box, not a p-packing case—he, he!"

And he laughed, Mr. Gregson feeling compelled to join him, although the laugh was at his expense.

"I'm glad to find you think of becoming a neighbour, my lord," said Gregson. "Quite a brilliant addition to the county."

"Yes, a Crownbrilliant," laughed his lordship, this time alone, Mr. Gregson not daring more than a smile.

"And now I must go. I'm going to call at the Cottage. Lady Mildred well?" he asked, looking another way, and speaking with that indifference which is always more eloquent than the tone it is meant to hide.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Bella. "We dined with her at the Hall a little while since."

"And Miss—Miss Lawley?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Bella, again, but with a sudden coldness in her voice. "Oh, yes, Miss Lawley is quite well, I think."

"Then I'll go," said his lordship, with a sudden precipitance. "Good-morning, Mr. Gregson; morning, Tom."

Coming to the gate near Lavinia, he said,—

"Nice day, isn't it? What do you think of the horse? Pretty colour!—yes, vewy. Good-morning!"

And his lordship cantered off.

"Bella," said Miss Lavinia, "I'm afraid—"

And she shook her head.

"So am I," said Miss Bella, shaking her's also.

At the Cottage gate Lord Crownbrilliant's manner lost a great deal of the calm with which it had carried things at the Folly.

Indeed his heart beat to such an extent as he dismounted that he felt half inclined to leave the card only and return to the inn.

But as the servant opened the door Lady Mildred crossed the hall, and the "card trick" fell through.

"I am glad to see you looking so well," said Lady Mildred as he took her hand.

And they went into the drawing-room.

"You have had a sad loss—very sad. I remember Lord Crownbrilliant, your father, a perfect Adonis in his youth. I danced three times with him in one evening at Lady Crushcrash's,

I think; very wrong I know, but he was perfectly irresistible. Dear me, dear me! how the time runs by!"

Lord Crownbrilliant murmured something and then he commenced looking round the room in an aimless sort of manner, and answering Lady Mildred's questions at random, whereupon her ladyship, who was no dullard, rang the bell and told a servant to inform Miss Lawley that Lord Crownbrilliant was in the drawing-room.

In three minutes which at one moment seemed an age and at another a flash of a second to his enamoured lordship, Carlotta entered the room.

How lovely she looked in her simple dress of white muslin with black lace, her dark hair brushed from her pure white brow and her eyes lit up with a gentle sympathy he had never seen there before, Lord Crownbrilliant could not have described.

His heart beat like a small bird against its prison bars, his face flushed, and for once as he came forward and took her hand he was perfectly natural.

What she said or what he said they neither of them knew, one feeling only of extreme joy running through him as he glanced at the black lace on her dress and thought that at least they had one thing in common—bereavement.

They walked through the garden into the conservatories, where Lady Mildred left them to fetch her sunshade.

His lordship, finding himself alone with his idol, got crimson and uneasy, but, stealing a glance at the regal face of his companion, was somewhat restored to his self-possession and affection by seeing that it was calm and perfectly unmoved.

"Pwetty flower," he said, toying with a camellia. "Nice for one's coat. I know a fellow whose mother used to lock him out of the conserwatawies because he picked the flowers."

Carlotta raised her eyebrows.

"That was cruel, though, perhaps necessary," she said. "Shall I give you this?"

"Will you?" he said, eagerly.

"Oh, yes," she replied, with the calm indifference which made her so irresistible, "if you will promise not to tell Lady Mildred."

"How is the wiver getting on?" he asked, leaning over the light oak fence and gazing at it.

"Getting on," she repeated, with a smile.

"Very nicely and very quickly. See!" and she dropped a leaf into the stream.

He dropped another, which, owing to a sudden stoppage of the first, caught it up.

"They have joined company," he said, eagerly.

"See; they are drifting down together."

And he pointed to the two leaves.

"So they are," said Carlotta.

"Life is like a stream," he said, coming nearer to her and playing with a branch that touched her arm—he dared not touch the arm itself.

"Life is like a stream, Miss Lawley; men and women are like—leaves, eh?"

Carlotta inclined her head.

"That's very pretty," she said, with a smile that barely escaped being scornful. "It sounds like Tennyson."

Then there came a silence, both leaning over the palings, she standing majestically at his side, both looking at the river.

"Miss Lawley, I'm going to buy a house—down here," said he.

She started the slightest in the world.

"Yes?" she said.

"Yes, I like Grassmere. It's very nice. Don't you like it?"

"Yes, very much."

"I'm glad of that," he said, eagerly. "Well, I'm going to look out for a little box near here. Mr. Gregson says there is one to be sold on the Annsleigh road—belonging to a captain he said, I think. Do you remember the one I mean?"

"Oh, yes, the Retreat."

"Yes, the Wetweat. Nice name, isn't it? Is it a nice place?"

"Yes, very beautiful," said Carlotta, staring at the stream, and avoiding his eyes, which were fixed on hers.

"You like it?" he asked.



"Yes; it is a very pretty place," she replied. "Then I'll buy it," he replied, emphatically. "I'll buy it whatever it costs. Miss Lawley, you wonder what makes me so anxious to get the place. It's because you like it. I—"

"Here is Lady Mildred," said the beautiful girl, turning her face, which was deadly white, towards the house. "It is luncheon time I expect."

"I won't stay, thank you," said his lordship, flushing. "I'm going at once, Lady Mildred. Horse tired of waiting, quite restless. Good-morning, Lady Mildred. Good-morning, Miss Lawley," and, pressing Carlotta's icy-cold hand, he vaulted into the saddle and galloped off, muttering:

"By Jove! how beautiful, he! he! I frightened her—white as a ghost. All wight, Clawence, old boy, all wight!"

She went back to the garden and the river, but murmured nothing; perhaps she was fully occupied in listening to the stream, which seemed to mutter brokenly as it swept over the pebbles:

"You will keep your oath and break my heart."

## CHAPTER XVI.

SCARCELY a quarter of an hour had elapsed since the wily Italian had glided down the old worm-eaten stairs of the house in Chelsea, when a firmer tread sounded on them, and a tall, majestically built figure unlocked the door and entered the room in which Spazzola had stood petrified with astonishment.

Removing his soft, broad-brimmed hat, and placing it on the table, the occupant of the room dropped into the hard chair with a weary gesture and a sigh.

An hour passed him thus motionless, tearless, yet filled with a weary despair that was worse than death. Then, as the sound of the clocks striking eleven boomed heavily through the air, he started, and, going to a small cupboard, took down from a peg a violin, and, leaning against the window, with his face turned towards the starlit sky, commenced playing.

As the sweet, subtle melody filled the room and turned it to a very Paradise of sound, its delicious strains won his soul from the despair it had fallen into, and gradually, as his long, white fingers caressed the instrument and brought forth from it a childlike, simple ballad of ineffable sweetness and mournfulness, his eyes filled with tears, his lips quivered, and his face lit up as did the faces of the martyrs of old when with the glare of the fire in their eyes they saw heaven's gates swinging slowly back to let them in.

Suddenly, in the very midst of a strain which he would have poured out its gold with a lavish hand to purchase, the strange player ceased, dropped his bow, sprang to the middle of the floor, and, stooping, picked up a piece of paper which lay there.

Carrying it to the window, he held it up to the moonlight, and ground out an imprecation between his teeth. On the paper was the imprint of a man's foot.

"Some one has been here!" he muttered. "The foot is too small for mine. The paper was unsoiled when I left it."

Cautiously he unlocked the door and quickly threw it open.

No one there. The landing, the stairs empty. Children's voices floating up from the street below.

He breathed hard, lowered the revolver, and threw his head back; then re-entering the room, lit a candle, and, with a gesture as if a sudden thought had struck him, again went outside, and, kneeling down, examined the tablet of the lock.

There were a number of scratches lately made; they shone bright and new in the garish flicker of the candle.

With a growl of anger he started to his feet, and panting like a trapped tiger, paced the room.

"Tracked at last—but by whom?" he muttered "whom? whom? Who could have picked that ock so deftly? No London thief, no clumsy ap-

prentice to the trade, no bungler. A master-hand turned that lock with so little damage. Whose—whose—whose but Spazzola's! Great Heaven! If I found him here our account should have been balanced! I must begone at once—to-night!

A creak on the stairs.

"Hist! what is that?" he hissed, starting and clutching his soft felt hat. "What is that? Spazzola, by his catlike tread! He is coming nearer and nearer. Another minute and I am lost!" and he looked round the room, clutching his revolver in a grasp of iron, his head thrown back, his body held like a hound in leash. "Ah!" he muttered, "the window!" and springing to it he unfastened its rusty catch, threw it open, and stepped out onto the rickety parapet, from which the time-eaten plaster fell in a small stream.

Scarcely had he done so than the door which he had left half open, was gently pushed back and the Italian entered the room.

Looking round with an eager gaze, his face fell blankly and he hissed out an oath. At that moment, however, the window, which the fugitive had of course been unable to fasten, blew open, and the Italian, with a frightful imprecation, sprang to it.

Directly his hand touched its ledge a sharp report rang through the air. The Italian clapped his hand to his shoulder and with a shriek fell to the ground, overturning the easel and smashing the window in his descent.

## CHAPTER XVII.

THOSE were dark days for Chudleigh Chichester. Young, handsome, possessed of a noble name and noble aims, he still, perhaps, was the most unhappy man in Grassmere.

The time of grace granted to Sir Fielding was gradually drawing to a close, and Chudleigh, with all his perseverance and honest striving to ward off the calamity, could see nothing but ruin before them. Then, besides this, his heart was torn with the pangs of unrequited, or rather unsatisfied love.

His idol, his queen—Carlotta—had destroyed his hope in the gallery of the Hall that spring night, and left him to watch with untold, unimaginable agony, the course of events which like a running stream bore Lord Crownbrilliant down to the prize which his heart thirsted and panted for.

Maud, who unconsciously from experience, knew what he was suffering, pitied him with her whole heart, hung about him when he was in the house, and accompanied him in his walks as often as he would let her, and strove to reveal to him, by word, look and touch the vast depths of her sisterly love.

Being ignorant of the true state of the case, Maud pitied both Carlotta and her brother, and lavished her great love on both, thus adding a fresh pang to the agony the strange beauty was already enduring.

Lord Crownbrilliant was still at the inn, the negotiations for the Retreat, as it was called, having, through some lawyer's reason, been delayed.

His servants had increased in number, and his equipages filled every available coach-house. Every day he visited the Folly, the Hall, and the Cottage, and accepted all the invitations to the two former.

Occasionally he ran up to town and back, or paid a visit of a few days to some of the county families; but ever returned to his post and—Carlotta.

Of course Lady Mildred did not long remain in ignorance as to which way the wind was blowing, and, with all a lady's love for match-making, she encouraged his lordship's suit and helped it on in every way she could. Whether Carlotta was grateful for this help she could not discover; indeed, generally, Carlotta was an unread book; a perfect mystery to her. But Lady Mildred was quite satisfied with loving her, and rather liked being mystified.

The Gregsons, like sensible people, refused to cry over spilt milk, and set about filling the Folly with eligible young men with or without titles, and succeeded, owing to their acquaintance

with the Hall and the Cottage, so that they could afford to look on and watch his lordship's fishing while they angled themselves.

One night, about three weeks after Lord Crownbrilliant had arrived at the inn, Maud was sitting by the oval window in the picture gallery, watching the moon as it crept up behind the tall elms in the park, and thinking, with saddened eyes, of the strange events which had brought so much disquietude and unhappiness to the Hall, and as she pondered, in the form of a dreamy reverie, over her brother's disappointment and Carlotta's strange choice which caused it, her thoughts wandered to a theme always ready to creep into her mind, and she recalled the night of the storm, when the dark figure of Maurice Durant had appeared in the room, and recalling with it every other scene in which he had afterwards figured, she was conscious of a wistful, almost painful longing to see the grand, sorrow-marked face, to hear the noble, kingly-toned voice again.

Suddenly the deep bark of a dog startled her, and, rising hastily, she sprang to the window, for she had recognised Tigris's bark.

Hurriedly unfastening a small piece of glass in the stained window, she leant out, and, peering through the moon mist, saw lights glimmering through the trees in the direction of the Rectory.

Her heart leapt in her bosom.

"He has returned!" she breathed. "He has returned safe! Ah, what is that?"

For, looking down, she had caught sight of something dark moving across the small patch of green between the park and the denser wood.

"It is he! It is he!" she murmured, quivering, like an aspen leaf, her eyes lit up with a sublime love. "Here, within reach of my voice! Shall I call? No, no, I cannot. Shall I call Tigris? No, no. Ah, Maurice, if you know how my poor heart beat at the sight only of your shadow! What is that?" she breathed, as at that moment, chiming in harmoniously with the musical wail of her voice, there broke upon the air a soft flood of the sublime melody she had heard ringing through the gallery from the old organ.

She recognized it in an instant, and her face flushed like a rose leaf, while her hand pressed against her heart to still its tumultuous throbbings, and one thought filled her with a delicious delight.

"Is he playing to me—to me?"

But before the melody had died away on the bosom of the night air she had answered the question with a sad "No, no, he is but playing for himself."

On the morrow Chudleigh greeted her entrance in the breakfast room with the announcement of Maurice Durant's return.

"When or how he came back no one knows," he said. "Last night the under-keeper saw a light flitting to and fro in the Rectory windows, and, thinking it meant thieves, stole along the hedge to reconnoitre. At the gate that big dog, Tigris, flew like a panther upon him and, he says, nearly killed him. As it was, Maurice Durant only just came up in time, dashing through a hedge and calling the dog off with a single word."

"Is Barber much hurt?" asked Maud, in a low voice.

"Well, not for him, though I fancy it would have been enough to kill another man. Maurice Durant took him down to the stream, he says, washed his bites, and gave him a handful of gold, with a stern caution not to approach the Rectory grounds again. Barber was quite satisfied, and, in telling me of the affair, seemed indeed rather delighted. His arm is bound up in linen wrappings, but he says he doesn't feel any pain, and has no doubt it will be all right in a day or two."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Folly was in a state of great excitement, for the Misses Gregson had coaxed their father into giving a lawn tennis tournament.

For two weeks before the event the house, as Tom said, was "flooded out of window."

A great chef took possession of the kitchen

cunning artificers seized on one of the reception rooms and turned it into a temporary theatre—for a London troupe of actors had been specially engaged to give a performance in the evening.

Notwithstanding Tom's repeated assurance for weeks beforehand that the particular Monday fixed on for the tournament would be a wet one, the day opened with a glorious burst of sunshine and without a single cloud.

The Gregsons found their hands quite full in the matter of reception, but they were backed up by Sir Fielding and Lord Crownbrilliant; and by constantly reiterating the assertion that the Folly was Liberty Hall, and taking the guests to the gorgeous marquees, in which refreshments of the choicest and most elaborate kinds were displayed, they got through very well.

A military band was stationed in the grounds, and around it, collected in groups, were the early arrivals, waiting till their partners in the first sets arrived.

Lord Crownbrilliant, Carlotta, and Bella Gregson found themselves together in one set, while Maud and Tom Gregson were parcelled into another.

Chudleigh was chained to a pretty little girl in the archery ground, and, with his usual good nature was vainly endeavouring to teach her how to use the bow, while his fine eyes constantly wandered to the noble figure of Carlotta in the distance.

Lord Crownbrilliant hated tennis, as he did every other game which necessitated his standing in the hot sun for any length of time, and Carlotta was scarcely one to be particularly delighted with sending balls over a net, so that it is little wonder their side came off the losers.

"By Jove!" murmured his lordship, shaking his head with a would be regretful smile, "we've lost—eh? I'm vewy sowwy. Never mind, b—better next time," he added with woeful cheerfulness. "Play again, Miss Lawley!" he asked, anxiously.

"No; I am rather hot. Where is Lady Mildred, I wonder?" said Carlotta, resting her hand upon his arm lightly.

"Lady Mildred! In the conservatory," replied Lord Crownbrilliant, promptly, who remembered seeing her ladyship at the end of the lawn behind. "We will go and find her."

"Thank you," said Carlotta, unsuspectingly, and they walked off in the direction of the huge glass buildings near the house.

"I don't see Lady Mildred," said Carlotta; when they had reached the centre of the artificial world of nature, where stood a rustic fountain. "I do not think she is here."

"At the other end, swaps," said Lord Crownbrilliant. "Won't you sit down a little while and wait?" and he brushed some leaves from a rock seat for her.

"Let us go and find Lady Mildred," she suggested after a few minutes rest in the lovely spot.

"Oh, no, not this minute!" he said, flushing, and dropping into the seat by her side. "Don't go this minute, Car—Miss Lawley. I want to speak to you—if I dare; you'll listen to me, won't you? I—Carlotta, I love you. I—you know I do, any fellow could see that I long ago. Oh, speak, oh, speak, Carlotta! Tell me you love me," then he stopped, for her cold, dreamy face startled him. "Are y-you ill?" he asked, aghast.

"Give me time," she gasped, as if for air. "Give me till to-night," she pleaded, pushing his hand away with her own icy one.

"No, no," he exclaimed, catching at her arm and drawing her towards him. "Now—now!—let me know if you love me and will be Lady Crownbrilliant!"

Was it possible that he knew the winning card that he should play it at this critical moment? "Now," he repeated, putting his other arm round her waist. "Come, Carlotta, a—say yes!"

A shudder ran through her frame, but her voice was cold, calm, unquivering and even clear as, summoning all her strength, she looked down upon him and said,—

"Yes."

## CHAPTER XIX.

WITH sunset ended tennis and the other outdoor amusements; the band, recruited by fresh members, moved to the handsome dining-room, where a splendid repast was laid out, to which the guests were thronging with an interest born of good appetites.

Sir Fielding, who had been greatly amused all the morning by watching the various groups, now filled a comfortable seat near the head of the table and commenced a conversation with a literary lion who wrote capital novels and wore a majestic mane of bright chestnut hair.

Chudleigh was seated next the Marchioness De Corby, a radiant young wife of twenty, and found his time not so fully occupied but that he could glean a moment or two to watch the bent head of Lord Crownbrilliant, which completely hid the beautiful one of Carlotta from his view. All the morning Chudleigh had been seeking that face, and now he guessed pretty well what had happened.

The repast over the ladies retired to gaze at the proscenium of the little theatre and wonder if the actors would be punctual.

Carlotta sank into an ottoman behind a window curtain and looked out upon the lawn with thoughtful eyes. Maud, who had been seeking her all the morning, caught the glitter of the white dress and went over to her.

"Carlotta, where have you been hiding?" she said, sinking on to a low seat at her feet, and looking up lovingly into the dark, impenetrable eyes.

"Hiding!" repeated Carlotta, shrinking from her touch, yet summoning a smile to her cold face. "Hiding! Nowhere. I have seen you once or twice. There are so many people here."

"Yes, are there not? and they seem so happy and amused. Are you enjoying yourself?"

Carlotta started and looked at her scrutinizingly. Was she showing the storm of agony that was raging within?

"Enjoying myself, dear Maud! Of course. Are you not?"

"Oh yes," replied the gentle girl, sighing at the almost harsh tone of the other. "Oh, yes; all are so kind and so clever. Here is Miss Gregson."

"Now, Miss Chichester, I have come to implore you to play for us. Pray do not say no."

Gentle Maud rose without a word, and Carlotta, shrinking behind the curtain, was left to her own black thoughts.

"Sir Fielding, have you heard that Mr. Townley, the Member for Annsleigh, is very ill?" asked the Honourable Mr. Howard, holding his glass for some wine.

"Yes," said Sir Fielding, "and I was very sorry to hear it."

"I regret to say that Mr. Townley has suffered a relapse," said Mr. Howard. "I only had the news as I was coming here."

"Things are critical now, very; and we could not afford to lose the seat."

The Honourable Mr. Howard was a Conservative.

"Should we lose it?" asked Chudleigh, gravely. Mr. Howard shook his head seriously.

"The other side are strong," he said, in a meditative voice.

Sir Fielding glanced at Mr. Gregson and saw that gentleman flash up.

"You need not be doubtful, Mr. Howard," he cried, in a triumphant voice, yet with just enough of respect in it to keep it from being offensive. "You would be sure to lose it. Warrington, the factory town, is incorporated with Annsleigh now, you know, and our interest there is strong."

"I was thinking of that," said Mr. Howard, smiling. "But be not too confident, Mr. Gregson; we fight hard, you know."

Mr. Gregson laughed heartily, but there was a malicious twinkle in his eye.

"It's a foregone conclusion," he said.

"We shall see," replied Mr. Howard gravely.

"Mr. Townley is not dead yet," said Sir Fielding, gently, and the others coloured.

"And I hope he won't die," exclaimed Mr. Gregson, honestly. "I'd rather lose the seat than a neighbour."

This lucky speech set the company straight again, and Chudleigh seized the slight pause to introduce the hunting topic, knowing that the people round him were always willing to hunt the fox, whether the ground were a rough bit of country or a shining mahogany table.

When he saw harmony restored and everyone engrossed, Chudleigh could endure it no longer, and, stepped into the open air, followed by a burst of music and the ripple and buzz of laughter.

"How much longer?" he muttered, pulling out his watch. "I have vowed to stop it through, or I would go. I would rather die a thousand times than stand by and watch her play with that idiot. Was it necessary to brazen it out so to set the whole room agape? Oh, Carlotta, Carlotta!"

As the words were wrung from him in his agony he fell into a rustic seat and hid his face in his hands.

The rustle of a dress startled him, and looking up he saw her, in the dimness he could see that her face was white and that her hand was pressed against her heart.

In a second his anger and bitterness had gone and with all his love in his voice he murmured her name and strode towards her.

She started, and with a suppressed murmur turned her face towards him.

"Carlotta!" he breathed huskily, "why do you shun me? At least you might have some pity—"

"Pity!" she murmured, vacantly staring at him with strained eyes.

"Yes, pity on me and yourself," he repeated, stretching out his hand to take her arm.

But she shrank back, and with a shudder of horror cried, piteously:

"Don't touch me—don't touch me!"

His heart seemed to die out in his bosom, and, pressing his hand to his forehead, he said, brokenly:

"Carlotta, is it—"

"Too late—too late!" she moaned, covering her face with her quivering hands. "I am his!"

Chudleigh lifted his hands with a gesture of despair and entreaty as a groan broke from his lips.

"You both seem worn out," said Sir Fielding, leaning back amongst the cushions of the carriage as it sped towards the Hall, and stroking Maud's hand, which rested on his knee.

"I am rather tired," replied Maud, "and I am so glad they did not keep it up very late, although I have enjoyed myself very much."

"It has been a long day," said Chudleigh, curtly, his head bowed upon his breast.

"A very successful one too," said Sir Fielding. "I am very glad. Gregson is a very worthy man—very. Heigh-ho!" yawning, "I am sleepy."

It was about three o'clock when Maud stood at her chamber door with her tiny filigree candlestick in her hand, and kissed Sir Fielding and Chudleigh.

"Good night, dear Chud. I am not at all sleepy nor tired, but you look worn out."

"I am tired," said Chudleigh, avoiding her eyes. "Good-night, Maudie."

And taking her lovely face in his hands he kissed her forehead and strode off to his own room.

"Poor Chud," murmured Maud, lovingly. "If I were Carlotta I think I could not help loving him."

Then she sighed herself, and sitting before her glass she let her hair fall in a glorious shower on her ivory shoulders.

As she did so she looked down and missed a little diamond cross she had worn at her throat.

"My cross!" she cried. "It must be on the stairs," she thought. "I wonder if I am brave enough to creep down and find it!"

After a moment's hesitation she took her candlestick, and holding it above her head, softly opened the door and stole out onto the corridor. Stair by stair she searched, but in vain, and when she had examined the long hall, and reached the door, she felt convinced that the trinket had dropped from her neck when she alighted from the carriage.

"Papa's present," she murmured, gazing at



the huge door wistfully. "I do not like to lose it, and I am sure it is lying on the steps. I wonder if I could unfasten the door! No—it is too heavy! Wait. If I am brave enough I could undo the drawing-room window, and walk round!

And, nerving herself to a pitch of courage that astonished her, she drew the silken cloak round her head and stole into the drawing-room.

Her heart nearly stopped beating as the window creaked on its hinges and she stepped out into the night.

But the cool, fresh air sent a thrill of pleasure and renewed courage through her frame, and she ran lightly round to the front.

"Ah! here it is. I knew it would be here!" she exclaimed as she saw the glittering bauble lying at the foot of the stone steps, and she sprang towards it.

At the moment her fingers touched it a burst of the low, sad music that she knew so well broke out upon the air and floated towards her, and, pressing her hand to her bosom, she started to her feet, gazing in the direction from which it came with white cheeks and frightened eyes.

"He is here! here! He will see me!" she thought, and tried to dart away, but her feet seemed chained to the ground, powerless to move.

In two minutes the feeling of fear had given way to that of delight, the subtle melody was stealing over her senses.

The music grew more distinct.

To her ear it assumed a voice calling, commanding her.

Slowly she stretched forth her hands and, with every appearance of a somnambulist, moved quietly, slowly in the direction of the wood.

Suddenly the music ceased, and with it the trance, if trance it was.

With a cry of love, alarm, surprise, all mingled, she stood still and tremblingly wondered how she could get back.

While she stood so a sound broke upon her ear, and sent the blood to her heart in a rushing stream.

It was a groan.

Whose?

Whose else but the being's who had summoned her by the heavenly music?

Casting off all fear, she sprang into the wood, her shining hair half escaping the silken hood, and falling in a sheen down her back.

Guided almost by instinct she threaded the thick trees, and with a sudden cry fell on her knees beside the still figure of a man stretched upon the bright, mossy grass.

"It is he!" she moaned, bending over the grand, uplifted face of Maurice Durant, white, deathlike and set.

Quick as lightning she sprang to her feet and caught up the rough cap lying beside him, then ran to the stream; in a minute more she was bending over him, moistening his dry, hot lips and cooling his forehead, her fingers lingering each moment with a timid caress.

While she did this in the pale light of the stars the bushes behind her parted noiselessly, and a man's head was thrust forward.

As its dark, flashing eyes rested upon the two silent forms they lit up with a blaze of savage glee, and a tawny, sunburnt hand was dashed against the full-lipped mouth to prevent the cry which the watcher in his joy almost uttered.

For two minutes he stood thus, drinking in the scene, then with a fiendish smile upon his sallow face he stole like an Indian from the spot.

At a hundred yards' distance he paused, and, throwing up his hand, muttered:

"Am I dreaming? Am I mad, or have I found him again? Oh, ye saints, or fiends, how ye do befriended Spazzola. Found him again when all hope was gone, found him, and how! Who is the beautiful girl?" and with a look of fiendish triumph on his face the Italian passed on to rejoin his three confederates.

Maud, watching the still, white face with its heavy lines drawn by the hands of sorrow and privation, saw, after she had bathed the cold forehead, which was as white as her own, the lips move with an expression of consciousness. Shrinking back with a feeling of thankfulness not

unmixed with alarm, she waited for some other sign of returning life.

It came. Raising his hand to his head, Maurice Durant felt the water upon his brow, opened his eyes, and, seeing a figure kneeling beside him, sprang to his feet with a fierce scowl.

"Who is it? Not—"

"Yes, I—Maud," she sobbed, in an agony of emotion. "You will not hurt me. I—I—found you lying on the ground—dying I thought. I knew you would be angry if I stayed, but—but, I couldn't leave you there, lying all alone."

His head dropped upon his bosom and he passed his hand across his brow with a groan.

"You should not have touched me," he said, in a low, ringing voice. "I have been ill—I am seized thus sometimes. Have you been here long, senora?"

Maud started, and, looking, saw that his eyes were still dim and half unconscious.

"Not long," she murmured, tremblingly. "You are still weak; will you not lean against the tree?"

"Weak!" he said, starting and looking down at the violin, which lay near the spot on which he had fallen. "Ah! I remember. Where is Tigris—I bid him guard the house—and you—how came you here?"

"I—"

How could she tell him that his music had drawn her thither?

With a quick look that told her he had read her thoughts he said:

"It is late. You should not be here. The brambles have torn your dress, your hands are scratched too. Come."

He turned to go.

Not one word of thanks had he uttered. She noticed it even as she turned to follow him, but thought nothing strange in the omission. All he did or left undone seemed best.

They went on a dozen yards, he brushing away and breaking down the tanglewood at each step, then he turned his head.

"You are tired," he said, with a sweet, grave smile that lit up his features till they became transformed. "I will carry you."

She shrank back, but his outstretched arms clasped her round, and, giving herself up to the maddening delight that filled her soul, she, with a sigh and the quiver of an autumn leaf, nestled against his breast, her head dropping on to his shoulder.

Silently he strode on, crushing the undergrowth beneath his heel, his hair blown now and again across her cheek, his breath fanning her bare arm, then when the terrace glimmered in front he knelt down, and with ineffable grace and tenderness set her on the ground.

"You are safe, child. I will watch you until you enter the house. Don't wander in the wood at night again."

He stood watching her girlish figure until it had disappeared into the house.

Then with his lips closed tightly, as if to stifle the passion at his heart, he strode back into the wood.

## CHAPTER XX.

THAT night, or rather morning, was an eventful one to more than the strange rector and gentle Maud.

Carlotta, white-faced and heavy-eyed, had retired to her room after seeing Lady Mildred comfortably ensconced in bed, and, receiving a kiss from her ladyship's kindly lips, felt as little inclined for sleep as Maud.

Clasping her white hands in front of her, and throwing her head back, she seemed gasping for air—for very life—while her rigid lips murmured in broken accents, that fell like icicles snapt from excess of cold,—

"Too late, too late!"

For half an hour she remained thus motionless, drowsy with the stupor of despair and an aching heart, when suddenly she heard a grating noise in the adjoining room which served the purposes of a boudoir and safe. In it Lady Mildred's and Carlotta's own few jewels were kept.

For the moment she thought nothing of the noise and dropped her weary head into its old position, but after a slight pause it came again, this time in the form of a rattling, and, now, thoroughly aroused and suspicious, Carlotta, rose and, gliding to the door, listened intently.

"Some one has broken into the house," she murmured. "Some one is trying the window!"

For a moment her heart beat with a wild terror, but the next with tightly compressed lips and glittering eyes she softly opened the door.

Pausing to let the slight sound of its creaking die away, the brave girl, strung up to an unnatural calm by excitement, stole along the passage, and reached the door of the room from whence the noise came.

It was ajar. Deliberately pushing it open far enough to admit her, she entered and saw the figure of a man, dressed in a fustian suit with heavy boots swathed with folds of list, a ragged fur cap upon his head, and a piece of black crape covering the upper part of his face.

He was bending down before a pretty toy cabinet, trying one of the doors with a small bar of iron by the light of a dark lantern.

By his side lay a pistol—not the first Carlotta Lawley had seen by very many. It was cocked, and, as she felt assured, was loaded.

On the ledge of the open window were two grappling hooks attached to a ladder of slight rope, by which the burglar had ascended.

Carlotta's keen eyes took in the position of affairs in a moment, and in another she had determined what to do.

Springing to the window, she unfastened the grappling irons and heard the ladder fall to the ground, then, turning, faced the burglar, who with a fearful imprecation ground out from beneath his teeth, leapt to his feet.

"You can fire if you like," she said to him with a marvellous calm. "The consequences are very easily told. The house would be alarmed, the ladder has gone, and your escape would be out of the question."

The burglar stared in amazement; his keen brain had taken in the sense and truth of her words at once.

Lowering his pistol, he said huskily,—

"Well, you are a cool'un miss," and there was a tone of admiration in his words. "Perhaps you'll tell me what you're goin' to do?" he growled, fingering the pistol but not offering to raise it again.

"That depends upon what you have done," said Carlotta. "Have you injured that cabinet?"

"No foolery," he croaked, "I'm not a goin' to stand it. Get out o' the way, and let me take the swag, or—"

and he raised the pistol again. Carlotta stretched out her hand, and caught the bell rope.

"Ah! you want me to ring, I see," she said, feeling her courage fast ebbing away, yet all the more determined that he should not see it.

"No—no!" cried the man. "I—"

"Stand back, then, and put down that pistol!" said Carlotta, in a firm voice of command.

Bill hesitated for a second, then, with an emphatic consignment of her eyes and limbs to a warm climate, he laid the pistol on the table.

"There!"

"Now," said Carlotta, at that moment noticing a jewel box lying on the floor with its lid torn open and sides broken in. "Now pick up that box, and put back the things you have taken from it."

Bill, the burglar, eyed her for a moment with sullen eyes, but a movement of the hand which held the bell rope decided him.

Slowly he picked up the box, and, unbuttoning his coat pocket, noiselessly plucked forth, as if he were plucking out his heart, the heap of glittering gems.

"Have you anything else?" asked Carlotta, sternly.

"No," snarled the man.

"Very well!" rejoined Carlotta. "Now then, there is a five-pound note; take it and go. If it is any use, I'll ask you to repay me for saving you from penal servitude by trying—trying, mark me—an honest life, but I'm afraid it would be waste of words and time. Take the note and go!"

And she held the crisp piece of paper towards him.

Bill came forward. The burglar's fears were changed to fervent admiration.

"Miss, I wouldn't touch a hair of yer head, I never meant to. Put the note away, chuck it in the fireplace, I won't touch it—well, if yer insists upon it, I will, but swear I'll keep it as a token of this 'ere night and you, miss!"

Thus saying, he disappeared under the ledge, and Carlotta fell in a half swoon against the cabinet she had so bravely protected, murmuring,

"Thank Heaven! if it had not been for this, I should have gone mad!"

(To be continued.)

## A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

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### CHAPTER VII.

AFTER a day of really considerable fatigue it might most reasonably have been supposed that Thorold Musgrove on retiring to his room on the night of the picnic would have sought or found rest in peaceful, dreamless slumber. The young man, however, did nothing of the sort. He began the night by wandering aimlessly about the big room, which by this time had become quite familiar and home-like to him with his hands plunged in his pockets he perambulated the wide old-fashioned apartment with its quaint corners and walls hung with pictures of the Stapleton family, taken at various stages of their career in various attitudes.

Thorold had seen these pictures each day since he had occupied this room; but to-night they had a new interest for him. He searched each photograph and sketch to find a trace of the bewildering beauty which had crept like poison into his veins and changed the whole current of his thoughts and ideas. He found her at last, not in one of the groups, but taken alone, seated on a shaggy Shetland pony, her glorious hair tossed and tumbled on her shoulders. He could see, even in this old photograph, the delicate lines that made her present loveliness, the eyes of the child were just as the eyes of the woman—large, marvellous, mysterious.

Thorold stood reverently before this picture of Miriam, his heart beat with a tenderness that softened and co-mingled with the hot passion that had suddenly been born in him.

His thoughts were not very clear or easy to sort out to-night, it was so strange for him to feel this thrilling touch throughout his being, this excitement beating in his veins.

He was another man altogether to what he had been, the future had another and a more brilliant aspect. Hitherto his work had been his ambition his keenest delight now his work would be supplanted by another influence—a pair of supple, little, white hands, a lithesome graceful form, a small, queenly head crowned with curls of red and gold, two violet grey eyes that shone and changed and said so much in their silent beauty. These things would live with Thorold for ever now, dancing before his eyes, bewildering his senses, stealing the heart from out his breast.

He walked up and down to relieve the restlessness, the agitation which had overwhelmed him. His brain seemed stimulated as though some potent intoxicating liquor had mounted up to it. Sleep was very far from him indeed. It was close on midnight when a gentle tap at the door made Thorold turn and start.

He went across quickly and opened the door. Lady Stapleton was outside. She looked at him with a faint, tender smile, but her eyes were sad and her face paler than usual.

"Forgive me for disturbing you, my dear," the gentle motherly woman said, softly, "but I felt a little anxious about you. I saw your light under the door, and I heard you walking about. I hope you are well, Thorold, my dear!"

The young man took her hands in his most tenderly.

"How kind you are, dear sweet Lady Stapleton," he said, hastily, touched to the heart as he always was by his hostess's sincere interest in him. "I am as well as I possibly can be. I was only walking about because I did not feel very sleepy, not a very usual circumstance with me I must confess," Thorold added with a slight laugh that betrayed so much to his listener's ear.

"You ought to be very sleepy to-night, Thorold," Lady Stapleton said, the faint smile breaking on her lips for a moment. "You have had enough air and exercise to make you sleep for a week. Go to bed, my dear. You must look upon me as a fidgety old woman, you know, and go to bed to oblige me."

"I would do a great deal more for you than that dear Lady Stapleton," Thorold said heartily and sincerely, and bending his tall head he kissed the kind woman affectionately. "I promise to be in bed in ten minutes, and I am quite sure I shall sleep like a top, just to oblige you!"

Lady Stapleton withdrew with a smile and closed the door. As she walked down the corridor to her own room her lips were not smiling, they were firmly set.

"How I wish I could see him go away to-morrow," she said to herself. "I love the boy, he has crept right into my heart, and I cannot bear to think he will suffer, and suffer too, through my own child. Each hour he spends now with Mimi will be full of danger to his peace of mind. Alas! I can see the mischief is already begun. If I could only speak openly to her. She used to be a sweet, dear, obedient child, but the years have changed her altogether, and every time we meet I see this change increased, more bitter, more sorrowful. To speak would be but to do him more harm. Mimi is now so autocratic she will brook no interference." Lady Stapleton gave a deep sigh as she reached her own room. "It is a sad thing that the mother and the mother alone, must be the one to see the shadow where all seems so beautiful so bright. Once married to Lord Settefeld it may be that Mimi will return to the sweetness of her childhood. I pray it may be so. Oh, I pray it with all my heart and soul!"

When morning came at last it found Thorold still awake. He had obeyed Lady Stapleton's desire and had gone to bed immediately, but not to sleep. Hour after hour sped on its way, and still the young man lay sleepless on his pillow, his eyes staring into the darkness, seeing nothing but the glorious vision of Miriam's beauty, his ears repeating again and again the soft, musical cadences of her voice.

Thorold did not regret his wakeful night. It had been long, but it had been filled with dreams—vague delicious dreams, such as had never come to him before—dreams of a future when fame and fortune should be his, and a radiant, lovely being with sunny hair and glorious eyes would share this fortune, would be his wife.

The arrival of his bath and some letters, set to rout these delicious dreams. Thorold experienced the first big disappointment of his life when he opened a most formidable looking envelope and found himself summoned to town without delay by a firm which employed him very largely, and with which it would be suicidal to quarrel.

Thorold had not anticipated such a recall. He had, in fact, been intending to extend his visit a little longer, as his kind hosts had entreated him to do for some time past.

The greatest delight he had felt throughout his long night of thought had been the realisation of the joy that he was under the same roof with Miriam; could be by her side all the morrow and each succeeding morrow; now this joy was denied him.

He could not, dared not refuse the order conveyed in the letter forwarded on to him from his rooms.

He must, in fact, journey up to London as quickly as possible. His pleasant holiday was at an end. He must bid farewell to all the young folks who had done so much to make him feel at home and enjoy his visit at Crowhurst. He must part from genial Sir Francis and sweet Lady Stapleton. He must tear himself away from the most divinely beautiful influence that could

spread itself around and about a man's heart and life, he must go back to London and to work.

Thorold went downstairs with a gloomy face, and there was universal consternation and regret expressed when he announced his news and his departure.

Everyone proposed some sort of excuse to him, everyone but Lady Stapleton and Miriam. The mother's feeling was indeed one of unmitigated satisfaction. She hailed the advent of this business summons with sincere pleasure, only because she desired to see Thorold put safely out of the danger which Miriam's beauty and coquetry was building up for him.

Miriam's satisfaction was no less than her mother's.

"The devil takes care of his own," she said to herself cynically, as she sat beside Thorold and murmured a few gentle words of regret, her eyes supplying what her words might have lacked. "Another day of him would be tedious and possibly annoying. I hold him now for as long as I like and as much as I require. He will worship me till the end of his days."

Miriam had the most supreme belief in her own powers, but it must be said that this belief was not egotism alone, but was forced upon her by everyday experiences.

"He will be ready to come to me whenever I shall want him, if ever I do. Really, I don't quite see why I should want him, but I like to be prepared on all sides. Life is full of surprises, and he who thinks he stands, falls most easily. All the same, I am glad he is going. Settefeld might have been annoyed if he had remained; and he is one of those thorough, earnest, unworldly beings that it would have been a little difficult, perhaps, to make him understand the situation exactly. Now, all promises to be well."

And, Miriam, while she was thinking these thoughts so complacently was conveying to, showed in a subtle, though unexpressed way, the disappointment, even the desolation, his news had brought upon her.

"You will come and see us in London. Aunt Alicia will be so pleased to see you. We have a tiny little house, but I am so fond of it; and there will always be a corner for you whenever you have time to come. Promise you will not forget me, Thorold!"

"What need to give you such a promise?" Thorold answered unsteadily, and even a little hoarsely. It was harder than he could have imagined this renunciation of his love for duty; this tearing of himself away from the living embodiment of his heart's truest delight, to go back to London and his lonely, loveless life. "What need to give you such a promise?" the poor fellow said; and his whole face and form were full of pathos. "You know I could never forget, even if I wished to do so."

Miriam laid her hand for an instant on his arm.

They were strolling through the conservatory now. Thorold's luggage was being brought down, and Sir Francis was bustling about before driving his guest to the station to start him off to London.

Miriam plucked a small gardenia.

"I must pin this in your coat. I adore gardenias! They seem to breathe out all that makes life endurable. Stand still, Thorold; you shall go back to your work like a knight of olden days went off to the wars, bearing some lady's token for which to fight."

"Miriam!" The word broke from the young man's pale lips in an accent of the deepest passion. "Miriam, if—"

But Miriam had whisked away.

"Daddy is calling you! It is time for you to go. Good-bye, Thorold! I have been so pleased to know you. Remember, you have promised to come and see me very soon. Good-bye, again! Silly boy! what are you doing? I am not a queen. You must not kiss my hand!"

"You are my queen!" Thorold said with sudden intensity. "My star—my world! I shall live in darkness till I see you again. Good-bye!"

There were many other partings, but Thorold felt none of them, remembered nothing concerning them (except, perhaps, a touch of real regret,



as he said farewell to Lady Stapleton). His whole mind and living self was left at the foot of the lovely soulless girl who stood smiling at him from the conservatory, a slender white-robed figure against the background of palms and ferns.

At the last moment something occurred to claim Sir Francis's attention. The Squire was in a great state, it was impossible for him to drive his guest to the station. Time was growing short, so Thorold sprang up into the dog-cart, and with one last glance at the comfortable old house where he had been so happy, he was driven rapidly away to the station.

Once arrived there with the dog-cart dismissed, Thorold found that there had been a mistake in the Squire's calculations, he had a good hour to wait for a London train. Restless and low-spirited Thorold left his luggage in care of the porter, and set out for a good brisk walk, the last probably he would be able to enjoy in the fresh bright country air for some time to come. He kept steadily away from the direction of Crowhurst, he could have walked back there quite easily, but he felt it was wiser not to do so, so setting his face resolutely against temptation, he was soon swinging along the lanes at a fine rate.

The air and the exercise soon restored him to his usual bright self, though nothing could root out from his heart and feelings now the bewitchment of Miriam Stapleton's memory. He began to feel a little contempt for himself for having been so childishly disappointed, and his thoughts began to turn instinctively in the direction of his work, and the order which had summoned his return to town. This recollection brought another—a sweet, a holy, a sorrowful one—the recollection of his dead mother and his ever living regret that she should not be present now to share in his joys and his success.

He conjured up a vision of what life could have been had his dear invalid been left to him now. Miriam's radiant loveliness seemed to be touched with a new value, as his thoughts linked her with his mother.

"How she would have glorified the sadness of my dear one's sick room," Thorold said to himself wistfully, "and how my mother would have adored her—she loved all beautiful things, and what is there on earth so beautiful as Miriam!"

This was a question which Nature herself should have answered, and most conclusively, at this moment, for surely no fairer picture could have been spread before the eyes of mortal than the picture of the country that stretched around him this morning—painted with the rich glowing tints of autumn—filled with the fragrance of the morning air that came to him fresh and clean under the kiss of the sun.

If Thorold were lost to the beauty of the moment, another person advancing slowly towards him on horseback was not so unappreciative.

Patricia had been out riding for some time. She had started very early. It was a habit with her to rush to solitude—to nature, if possible—when anything occurred to trouble her or make her very sad.

She let the reins fall on her mare's neck, and walked soberly through the long lanes. She caught sight of Thorold's figure a long way off in the distance, but it was not until she was some quite close that she recognised the young man. She was not surprised to see him, but she was surprised at herself a little for feeling a little pleased to do so.

There had been something about Thorold even, having seen in the twilight as she had done the evening before, that gave Lady Patricia a sense of sympathy—of satisfaction—as it were.

Possibly she might never have thought twice about Mr. Musgrove under ordinary circumstances, but the curious anxiety that had betrayed itself in Lady Stapleton's manner when Thorold had entered the hall the evening before and had further explained the reason of his unexpected return had instantly appealed to Patricia, for had she not had herself exactly the same anxiety and doubt where Miriam Stapleton was concerned.

With her mind occupied at this moment solely and entirely with this harassing question of Miriam, brought home to her now in a definite and painful form, Patricia De Burgh felt that some of

her sympathy was due to this young man, who was bound to suffer far more deeply than she even by the news which her brother at length announced to her in all its fullness.

By the way, Thorold was walking so quickly, with his head bent and his intention centred so evidently on himself and his thoughts, Lady Patricia imagined at first that he, like herself, knew what had happened and was plodding along this solitary lane for the purpose of beating out the first sting of the trouble alone as she was doing.

As they drew near, however, and both stopped involuntarily, Patricia read instantly in his eyes that whatever his thoughts were they were not really troubled ones. His clear, frank face was one on which the emotions would be written as though inscribed on a virgin page, and the emotion written now on Thorold's face was not a troubled one.

She drew rein and came to a standstill at the very same moment that Thorold paused.

"We meet as two big ships do sometimes on a vast ocean. We must stop and exchange signals, Mr. Musgrove," the girl said speaking first not without a touch of shyness. She bent down and stretched out her small hand in its thick riding-glove, "I am afraid, however, you don't remember me!"

"Indeed I do," Thorold answered in his heartiest fashion. "I hope you arrived home quite safely last night, Lady Patricia?"

She thanked him in her own pretty, if cold, fashion.

"And you, did you overtake the picnic party? You had a long ride had you not?"

"Oh! I am only too glad to have had all the exercise that was possible to me, I get so much indoor air and so much sedentary work when I am in London which I am nearly all the year through."

Thorold was looking with keen appreciation and something more at the girl sitting so proudly in the saddle just above him.

He did not in the least consider Lady Patricia beautiful, in fact she was not even pretty; but yet there was that about her that touched his admiration to the full.

She was rightly named he thought to himself as he looked at her—for she was patrician in very truth—a grave young patrician with her pale oval face, her dark hair closely coiled under the low felt hat, her small curved red lips, her big dark eyes.

Every line of her figure as she sat in the saddle was graceful—though she was pre-eminently neat she had not that hard air that characterises so often a good horsewoman—she was only very, very dignified and very attractive.

To Thorold there was something more than her patrician bearing that conveyed attraction. There was a tired dark look about her eyes that was suspiciously akin to tear-stains, and her small mouth had a tremulous expression that seemed to tell him clearly she was suffering some mental pain.

There was nothing that hurt Thorold Musgrove so much as to feel a woman was in sorrow.

He looked at Patricia with such tender pity in his eyes, albeit he himself was unconscious that his eyes said so much, that the girl felt her pale cheeks glow a little and her liking and sympathy for this young man grow a little stronger.

"You are going back to London soon?" she asked.

"I am going now, immediately."

Thorold gave a little sigh as he said this and she heard the sigh and interpreted it at its right meaning. Her intuitive distrust and doubt of Miriam was deepened in this moment.

She had been let into Thorold's secret unawares, it had been Lady Stapleton's manner that said so little and yet so much that had enlightened her, and the pity she had given him unconsciously when first she had realised the truth of his heart became a warm feeling of indignation now against the girl who could so play with a man's heart when all the time she was pledging herself to another.

Her own heart contracted as she remembered what this woman's was to be henceforth, the wife of her adored brother, mistress of his home

sharer of his proud position. It was as though fate decreed Patricia's mind was never to be lulled into other and more tranquil thoughts of Miriam.

If she had never doubted before she must have doubted now when she saw on Thorold's face that lingering touch of happiness which love and love's hope alone can bring.

She was very young, and she knew very little of the world and its ways, but she knew enough of life to realise that when Miriam's marriage was made known to this young man standing beside her under the morning sunshine, tenderly stroking the satin brown skin of her pretty mare, it would bring about no common grief, but would go far to darken the whole light and glory of the man's life for many and many a day to come.

## CHAPTER VIII.

PATRICIA DE BURGH rode on more quickly after she had parted from Thorold. Her thoughts were full of him as she went on her way. They had gone along the road together, and, in a few brief words, he had told her of his work and all that appertained to his simple, industrious life.

She had been sincerely interested, more especially when she knew what profession he followed.

"Danvers would like him," she said to herself when she was alone, "he is just the sort of man Danvers always likes, someone out of the common above the rest of ordinary human beings. He must be very clever, great minds are always simple and unaffected. I should like to meet him again to know more about this marvellous engineering work he is going to undertake, but it is not very likely, our paths lie so wide apart, mamma would probably call him a labouring man."

Patricia smiled faintly at this thought; she knew her mother so well.

"And apart from mamma there comes this fact about Miriam Stapleton. Oh! dear—is it wicked of me I wonder to wish she had never come into my dear brother's path. I long to see him happy—to know his life will be peaceful and good, and now my heart is racked about his future. How can I go to her as he has asked and begged her to become his wife—it is impossible—it is like asking for his unhappiness—she knows what this will cost me, that is why she has set such a condition upon Danvers, not that she will really let it weigh with her."

Patricia could not keep down this contemptuous thought.

"She has made up her mind to marry him from the first, and marry him she will, whether I go to her now as she has stipulated, or whether I never go—alas!" the girl said to herself with a wistful sigh, "I never used to think such hard things, but something forces me here. It is as though some unseen spirit were always at my side whispering to me. This doubt, this mistrust of one whom in reality I scarcely know. I hope, oh! how I hope I may be wrong. The time for fear is over. The worst has happened for good or for evil, Danvers will bind his life in with hers. I can do nothing but pray that my dear dear brother may never have cause to regret what he has done."

Riding swiftly now, Lady Patricia was not long before she reached her present home. The Earl was out on the lawn, in riding dress, as she appeared.

"Where have you been, Pat?" he asked a little anxiously. "I have been getting almost frightened about you. I hear you went out ever so early, and now it is past eleven." He held her in his arms for a moment, as she slipped from the saddle. "You promised me last night you would never go so far by yourself again, but—" he paused, a radiance broke out on his dark handsome face, "but, perhaps, I am wrong to scold you, Pat—perhaps you have been out on my errand."

His voice was very soft, very full of tenderness. Patricia released herself from his hold. She turned pale as she shook her head.



PATRICIA DREW REIN AND CAME TO A STANDSTILL AT THE VERY SAME MOMENT THAT THOROLD PAUSED.

"No, Danvers, dear. I have not been to Crowhurst," she said, quietly.

He looked at her intently.

"But you intend to go, Pat—do you not?" The girl paused. They had turned, and were walking towards the small house with its long windows thrown hospitably open. Lady Patricia gathered up her habit in a hand that had grown icy cold.

It was a moment of supreme pain to her—her brother had asked a favour of her and she was about to refuse the favour for the first time in all her young life.

"I cannot," she answered him, hurriedly. "I cannot do this, Danvers. Do not ask me, darling!"

The Earl's face was hard and pale—the likeness between them was very great at this moment.

"I ask you this, Patricia, as no light thing—no frivolous conventionality; I ask it from my heart. If you refuse me you will hurt me most bitterly. You may indeed spoil the whole beauty and happiness of my life."

Lady Patricia winced at his tone, but a certain touch of his hardness crept into her. She was not unjust by nature, but something within her cried out against this lovely young creature who had bewitched her brother even as she had bewitched the young man from whom she had just parted.

"Is Miss Stapleton's love absolutely a conditional thing, then?" she asked, coldly. "It seems to me a sorry prospect for your future, Danvers, if you and your love will not content her."

"It is not like you to sneer at any one, Patricia," Lord Settefeild made answer. He was growing very angry but he controlled himself, for he wanted to woo from his sister this favour his love desired. "I confess I do not understand your attitude in this matter. Why do you set yourself so coldly, so cruelly, against one whom you absolutely do not know? Is my judgment to go for nothing in this?—am I to be set down as a fool? I am no boy now, but a man who has

studied the world, and who has had many more opportunities of understanding the people in the world than you can ever possibly obtain, my little sister. Be frank, if you will, and range yourself on my mother's side—tell me you do not consider the Stapleton family equal to ours in birth and position—then, though I may not agree, I shall not quarrel with you; but do not arrogate to yourself the right to judge and denounce another's nature and character, not from knowledge or experience, but from some most vague and unsatisfactory feelings which you cannot by any means whatever explain to me or to yourself. I deny your right to speak harshly of Miriam's nature. You do not know her. Wait till you have proved the truth of your doubts—the need for your mistrust—then it will be a different matter!"

Lady Patricia stood on the threshold of the low, porch-like door. She drew her gloves off slowly, yet with a concentrated interest that spoke of intense nervous and mental pain. She looked at her brother with tears in her big eyes.

"Why will you probe this matter, Danvers, dear?" she said in low, hurried tones. "I grant that much, perhaps all, you have urged is just, is right, still it does not touch me. I—I cannot think as you do. I cannot see with your eyes, I have nothing but intuition to guide me, but I am, alas, only too sure my intuition is right!"

Lord Settefeild passed into the hall in silence, and the girl followed him.

He called to the butler as he entered.

"I want a groom to ride with this telegram to the station immediately," he said, and he sat down at the table and began filling in a foreign form quickly.

Lady Patricia stood beside him proud and quiet, but the heart in her breast was cold and heavy.

"You are telegraphing to mamma," she said as the butler went away.

Lord Settefeild bowed his head.

"I have told her you will join her to-morrow or the next day," he said coldly.

Lady Patricia winced.

"You—you will send me from you, Danvers?" she said brokenly.

"I have no choice. You are determined to insult Miss Stapleton, I am as equally determined to protect my future wife from all possible insult, now and in the future."

The girl stood motionless by the table. The tears that would come escaped from her heavy lashes, and rolled down her face.

And this was the holiday to which she had looked forward so eagerly! This the happiness for which she had yearned! This the brother whom she had always adored as her dearest friend, her sweetest comfort!

The Earl went out without looking at her, without speaking, and Lady Patricia woke at last out of the stupor of her bitter pain. She went up the narrow staircase slowly, with bent head and lagging feet.

"If she has done nothing else she has robbed me of my brother's love," the girl said to herself heavily in this moment.

She had not been wise, perhaps, in her treatment of her brother's wish. Another, more worldly than she, would have temporized a little, have played a rôle, but Patricia De Burgh could never do this.

She turned with all the intensity of her love against the marriage her brother was about to make. She doubted the nature of the woman he would marry, and she spoke out her doubt boldly, frankly, fearlessly.

Her courage brought disaster upon her, and taught the meaning of loss in all its bitterness, but worse than all this, worse than her own pain, was that strong, vivid presentiment that the brother who put her aside now because of Miriam Stapleton, would learn only too surely, only too well, that the doubts which crowded her girlish mind so persistently, were no idle, foolish things, but the uplifted voice of warning to lead him, if possible, from a fate that was to be so full of misery, to end in tragedy!

(To be continued.)





"YOU ARE VERY GOOD TO REMEMBER HER SO FAITHFULLY," NIGEL SAID, IN A LOW VOICE, APPROACHING THE GRAVE.

## THE LITTLE CHORUS GIRL.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

"It is really most distressing," said Mrs. Chandos, her handsome, well-preserved face darkened by a frown, "you see there is no escape for us. The girl must come here, and I am quite sure that all pleasure in life is over for me."

Her friend and gossip looked the sympathy she did not know how to express; what she said was,—

"Tell me all about it, dear."

"I may as well. The story will soon be common property, and I shall have to endure any amount of unpleasantness because of it. Of course, you know, my brother Alden (she was wearing mourning, of the most approved style, for him, then) has always figured as a bachelor, and, naturally, when he died, we expected—that is, I did—Nigel would inherit all. You see, Clara, since my husband's decease, our means have been a good deal straightened, and, as Alden always made much of Nigel, I could not blind myself to what might happen."

"Alden was many years my senior, and in the course of nature must pass away first. Well, we went to the funeral, and afterwards, Platt (my brother's solicitor), had a nice little surprise in store for us in the shape of a letter from him and the certificates of a marriage and a birth."

"It appears that when he was nearly thirty-nine, and quite old enough to know better, he married secretly a chorus girl from The Imperial. But he never confessed his true position to her, and, until her death, she figured as Mrs. Alden."

"They did not agree very well, and, after two years of marriage, separated, he allowing her a small annuity—he always was a miserly soul. I

suppose he never troubled about her or the child after they parted; that was like him. But when, on his death-bed, he instituted inquiries, and discovered his wife had been dead two years—which accounted for her not applying for the annuity of which, it seems, the girl was in ignorance—doubtless Mrs. Alden Winfield had her own reasons for secrecy, and, as she died suddenly, there was no chance of enlightening her. She, too, has followed in the dead woman's steps, and is a chorus singer. You can easily guess the sort of girl I may expect to share my home. And, worst of all, her father has appointed Nigel her guardian."

"It is monstrous! Why, he is only twenty-eight, and Miss Winfield is eighteen. If he refuses the charge he forfeits an annuity of a thousand pounds, whilst I am the poorer by a sum of five hundred. I can't afford to refuse that even for the three years which must pass before she attains her majority. In fact I am to continue to receive it so long as she remains at St. Chads; and should Nigel marry her, on their wedding-day I am to receive a gift of two thousand pounds."

"My dear," said Mrs. Llewellyn, "you would be mad to refuse compliance with your brother's wishes; and, after all, Miss Winfield may not be impossible."

"But, Nigel! Oh, he is so intensely annoyed, it has taken all my tact and powers of persuasion to induce him to receive her."

"It is very hard for you. Well, I must really be going. Take my advice, Maria, and pay no heed to your son's objections. I can only say I envy you the good fortune which may be in store for you, and wish that my boy, Dave, stood in Nigel's shoes. By the way, when does the *bête noir* arrive?"

"To-night. I shall send the carriage for her. I really am not equal to meeting her in public for the first time."

"What do they call her?"

"She was christened after her mother, and is popularly known as Chris Alden—not even Christine or Christabel. Think of it! And it

is much worse now that she will take her place in society as 'Chris Winfield!' Good-bye! our talk has a little lightened my load."

Mrs. Chandos had put back the dinner an hour to suit her young relative's convenience; for, much as she disliked the idea of receiving her, and, indeed, without knowing her, disliked her for "ousting" Nigel from his proper position, she was not blind to her own interests; and it was clearly to her advantage to make St. Chads so pleasant that Miss Winfield would not soon wish to leave it.

At eight o'clock the sound of wheels was heard upon the drive, and, with a gesture of impatience, Mrs. Chandos rose.

"It is much too bad of Nigel," she said, "to leave me alone to receive that awful girl!" Then, assuming her sweetest smile, she went out into the hall to give the stranger false welcome.

The solemn footman flung wide the door, and up the steps ran a young girl. Mrs. Chandos suppressed a cry of horror as she saw she did not even wear mourning.

She was a small creature, with delicate pink and white complexion and close-cropped yellow curls, which gave her the appearance of a very young and pretty boy. She wore a grey dress and cloak surmounted by a scarlet toque; and, as she came forward, she put out a slender, neatly-gloved hand, saying,—

"How do you do, auntie! I'm pleased to make your acquaintance!"

Such *sang froid* completely staggered Mrs. Chandos, and the reply she made was very incoherent.

The girl laughed slightly, then said,—

"I should fancy you were taken back a good deal when you heard about me. I was pretty well staggered myself; and it seems awfully funny to find I have anybody belonging to me!"

The voice was sweet and clear, but pitched just a little too high; and Mrs. Chandos shuddered as she said,—

"You would like to take off your wraps. I

will be your maid for to-night; and led her to the rooms appointed for her use.

"Oh, don't stay," remarked Chris. "I can manage very well by myself; I'm used to roughing it, and I can easily find my way downstairs. This is an awfully swagger room, auntie, and I don't know how to thank you for making it so pretty;" saying which she lifted her plauante face to be kissed; but Mrs. Chandos felt no softening towards her as she went away.

"She is simply horrid," she said to Nigel who had just come in, "she talks slang and treats me with dreadful familiarity. I suppose you would call her pretty (suddenly remembering she wished him to marry Chris), and of course it is possible to improve her. She may be a diamond in the rough—"

He interrupted her impatiently.

"That is so likely, is it not? I wish you had listened to me and refused to agree to Platt's terms."

He was a tall young man, dark, and of distinguished appearance; not at all handsome, and, because of his reserved manners not a very general favourite.

Even his mother stood a little in awe of the son she worshipped, but did not understand.

Before any chance for further speech occurred Chris came in. She had donned a ruby-coloured gown high at the throat, with sleeves descending to the wrist.

"I haven't a dinner-dress," she said, apologetically, "so I thought this would do. Mr. Platt gave me a cheque before I came away, so to-morrow I can buy a new stock of gowns and things—"

Then she caught sight of Nigel and Mrs. Chandos hastened to introduce them.

"I hope you are well," said the young man gravely, even coldly.

"Oh, yes, thanks, cousin. And you can't tell how glad I am to find you a male cousin. I usually prefer men friends; they are generally more honest," which sentiment brought a very dark look into her aunt's eyes.

The dinner passed uncomfortably, and the elder lady was angry with herself that she stood too much in awe of her niece to remonstrate with her on her peculiarities, until Nigel joined them in the drawing-room and so lent her his support. Then she began the attack.

"My dear Chris," she said, "I must beg you to forgive my very plain speaking—"

"Oh," interrupted Miss Winfield, laughing, "at the Imperial each girl speaks her mind very freely. What fault have you to find with me?"

"My dear, it is a slight piece of forgetfulness on your part. I am sure you would not want only insult your father's memory. Mr. Platt should have advised you to procure suitable mourning before coming down to Binkley."

Nigel, who was watching her from behind his paper, saw her fair face flush and her blue eyes harden, as she said, angrily,—

"Why should I pay him even the outward semblance of respect? I never knew him—I despise him. For years and years he ignored my mother—"

"You see," deprecatingly, "she was, socially, so very much his inferior."

"She was good enough for him to marry;" bluntly. "There aren't many men I should think her equal. But he left her, and he didn't care whether I lived or died; I can't see that I owe him any respect."

Secretly, Nigel applauded this sentiment; but he maintained profound silence whilst his mother said smoothly,—

"You hardly understand my dear. It is scarcely to be expected that you would with your very peculiar training; but society demands certain things of us, and regards us oddly if we fail to give them—"

"I hate shams of any kind," said Chris. "At The Imperial we—"

"My dear, do forget The Imperial, and let me impress upon you that any eccentricity of yours will but recoil upon us."

"Oh, if that is so," Chris answered quickly, "I'll wear black; but it must be of the slightest description, and you must understand I do it

out of respect for your wishes, and not because I care a fig for society."

Her eyes met Nigel's as she spoke, and although he did not approve her, he could not resist the temptation to laugh. She laughed in response.

"I dare say you think I am awfully wicked," she remarked tentatively, "but, really, my conscience is very easy on that score; I know my father was a cruel and a wicked man—I learned that from his letters to my mother—and I don't profess to feel regret at his death. You see, if he had acted fairly by me, I should not now be an offence to you"—here her face grew wistful as her voice—"I might have been educated into a lady, as it is I am only what circumstances have made me." She rose hurriedly and seemed about to quit the room.

Nigel thought there were tears in her eyes and vaguely pitied her; but the next moment her light laughter broke out and slew his compassion.

"I am laughing simply because I cannot help it. It is so very, very comical that I should be treated with deference by those round me, that I should be waited upon by smart servants. You should have seen the maid of the house where we—Lola, Minnie Smith and I lodged—I don't think she ever had a clean face save on Sundays and Bank Holidays; she had not time to wash."

"My dear Chris, I beg of you not to indulge in such reminiscences. You must remember that you are Mr. Alden Winfield's daughter, and adapt your manners and conversation to your altered circumstances."

"You can't make a silk purse, I mean," struggling hard with her laughter, "you can't make a lady out of such raw material, but I will try really not to vex or disgrace you, I have so much to learn. You see at The Imperial—oh, I beg your pardon I was forgetting again!"

## CHAPTER II.

It is undeniable that as a young lady Chris was a failure; she resembled nothing so much as a pretty audacious boy; she loved mischief for mischief's sake, and being of a cheerful nature used to go about the house singing gay little songs, not usually heard in fashionable drawing-rooms. She had a remarkably pretty voice, and played fairly well; but as her choice hovered between negro ditties and comic choruses, Mrs. Chandos was best pleased when she was silent. She was a constant thorn in that lady's side; her frank criticisms on the ways and manners of the people with whom she now mixed, her liberal use of slang, her constant reference to the past were all as gall and wormwood to her aunt; and Nigel certainly regarded her unfavourably. He saw nothing in her but a pretty and rather fast specimen of girlhood, and his thoughts of her were very unjust. *Marry her! Never; better starvation (and, thank Heaven, there was no fear of sharp poverty) than life spent with such a woman.* Then, too, Mona Llewellyn was his ideal, and he had good grounds for hoping she loved him. Tall, stately, beautiful, his mother could urge nothing against her save her absolute lack of fortune, and in good time he intended asking Mona to share his lot.

Mrs. Chandos felt it incumbent to introduce her niece in a public way.

"Better get it over," said Mrs. Llewellyn, "people will the sooner become used to her *gaucheries*, and as she is pretty and rich much will be forgiven her."

Acting on this advice, the lady carefully tutored the girl for a whole month, and then gave a great dinner. The utmost Chris would concede in the way of mourning was a gown of black net, profusely trimmed with jet, which served to enhance the whiteness of her slender throat and pretty arms; the little head "running over with curls," was entirely unadorned, and as she made her appearance more than one young fellow glanced admiringly at the *petite* figure and charming face.

"Your cousin is decidedly pretty," said Mona to her companion, "what a sad pity that her training has been so defective." Then with an

upward glance of her large brown eyes, "of course you admire her greatly, Nigel?"

"No, I don't—you know that I think only of you."

"Hush, mamma will hear; you are so rash. There don't look so disconsolate. Some day—soon—you shall tell her all," and she smiled so sweetly upon him that the gloom left his face. Perhaps after all Mona was right to bid him keep silence awhile, and yet he hated anything that savoured of deceit.

Dave Llewellyn took Chris in to dinner. He was a frank-faced young fellow, without any of his sister's regal beauty; but Chris found him a genial partner, and chatted in her brightest way, quite oblivious of the fact that Mrs. Chandos was watching her every action, straining her ears to catch the gist of her conversation. And, in a lull, the clear treble was heard remarking,—

"Oh, I wouldn't play a chum, low. Nothing is so mean, as Lola says."

What Lola said was not heard, because suddenly Mrs. Chandos,—

"Chris, what is that pretty song you promised to get Miss Bernard. The one you sang the night she was prevented returning home by the storm!"

"Did I promise? really I forget. Was it 'Massa's in de cold, cold ground!'" Oh yes, thank you for the reminder," and she turned once more to her companion. No further unpleasantness occurred until the gentleman filed into the drawing-room. Dave immediately taking up a position by Chris. A picnic was under discussion, and the girl was very eager about it. "There is nothing jollier," she said, confidentially, "provided you get a nice lot of people together and the weather is good. When I was at The Imperial (it was out—and Mrs. Chandos felt like fainting) a lot of us used to join together. We were none of us rich, so each put so much into the purse, just for extras you know, and everybody took some sort of provisions in a basket. Sometimes we went to Hampstead, at others to Greenwich, and oh! what fun we had! I wonder are your picnics quite as jolly as ours?"

"I hope you will think so," Dave answered very much enjoying his hostess' confusion; "but I am afraid you will find them rather tame, we don't usually indulge in great romps;" and then some one began to sing, and so their conversation was drowned. But Dave leaning nearer, with his merry eyes fixed upon her, asked,—

"Don't you find it a little bit dull here sometimes?"

"It is deadly dull. If I laugh I am scolded, if I indulge in a waltz when I ought to walk, Mrs. Chandos looks volumes. She expects me to be the pink of perfection, and I'm miles off being that. It seems to me that the girls here dare not do anything without first 'asking mamma.'"

"I wonder if you dare do something which would please me very much, and rather tease auntie?"

The girl questioned, her eyes wickedly sparkling, "Suppose you try me. Is it very, very dreadful?"

"Mrs. Grundy might think so; I don't. Will you get up quite early to-morrow and meet me at the gates; I will row you down, as far as Binkley Fen, and you can be back before your absence is discovered. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes, and thank you very much; but I shall tell aunt where I have been when I return; I never do anything of which I am ashamed." There was a touch of pride in her voice and manner which did not escape Dave.

"She's a dear little thing," he thought, with a slight flush on his cheek, "and they are fools to be ashamed of her. Lots of girls talk slang for slang's sake. She has been used to hearing it all her life, and does not know it isn't good form. Then, I wonder if there are many quite so open and frank as she. I know Mona isn't above telling a white lie; yet she has been properly trained. Poor little Chris, even Nigel is down upon her, and yet he has got to marry her. I almost wish I had not asked her to go on that excursion."

But in the morning he forgot to be prudent, as Chris came running down to the gates to meet him. She was wearing a white cotton frock with black ribbons, a broad-brimmed sailor hat, with a



simple band; and she looked so fresh and dainty it was hard to believe she had ever danced and sung behind the footlights.

A very short walk brought them to the river, and having assisted his companion into the boat, Dave said,—

"Now while I scull and you steer, you shall tell me all that you please about yourself. We are going to be great friends."

"I'm sure, I hope so, you are so exceedingly jolly and nice. Everybody else seems to think me a sort of heathen, and it isn't pleasant."

"I can quite believe that, Miss Chris; but country people are built that way; then, too, some of them are a wee bit jealous of you because you are so pretty."

"Now," she said, holding up a warning finger, "if you begin to flatter I shall not like you, and it will prevent us being good chums. Oh, did I ever tell you anything about Lola?"

"You were saying something about her last night when Mrs. Chandos interrupted you."

"Oh yes, she does that always when I speak of the past. She is so ashamed of it; but I am not, and when I am of age I shall go to live with Lola and her sister Minnie. They are my very dearest friends. I dare say (a wistful note creeping into her voice), you would not like them, because they are not ladies—they can't speak very well, and they write dreadfully."

"Never mind those accomplishments," said Dave, cheerfully, "so long as their hearts are in the right place; I am quite certain I should like them awfully."

"You are really a very nice boy," Chris said quite gravely, "and when we are all living together you must come to see us. Mother died two years ago, and then I was all alone in my trouble; Lola came to comfort and help me. When it was all over—the funeral I mean—she took me back to her lodgings, and I lived with her and Minnie until Mr. Platt came with his wonderful news. I laughed at him at first; really I thought he was *chaffing*," she paused, catching the amused gleam in his eyes.

"Did I say anything wrong, please. If you would only tell me?"

"Well chaffing is hardly a society phrase, but go on, I shall not quarrel with you over a word."

"But I really want to improve. I—I should like Nigel to see I am not quite the ignorant and—and fast sort of girl he believes me. Will you help me in this?"

"In this and anything else. Go on with your story; I am interested."

"Well, as you may suppose, chorus girls aren't too well paid. It was all we three could do to keep a comfortable home together, and to dress decently. But Lola is a wonderful manager, which is better than being pretty—she isn't that—and we were as happy as the birds in the air. But sometimes it was pretty hard to make both ends meet, especially in the winter. But there are lots of things to be had cheap in London, and when we left The Imperial, hungry and cold, many a time we have stopped at a hot potato stall, and bought one each. We used to thrust them into our muffs and *that* kept our hands warm, and then they were quite hot when we reached home, and served us for supper. Oh dear," laughing, "how terrified aunt would be if only she could hear my disclosures."

Dave had never enjoyed a row to Buckley Fen so much. His companion was so bright and interested; her unconventional remarks were a never ending source of amusement to him.

At the Buckley Arms each had a glass of milk, with a thick slice of bread-and-butter; then he rowed her home, afterwards walking with her to St. Chads.

At the gates they met Nigel, who, ignoring his cousin, said, "Dave, I did not think you would take advantage of Miss Winfield's ignorance of social customs in such a fashion, unless I thought you acted on the impulse of the—"

"I wanted to go," broke in Chris, "you need not quarrel with your friend on my account, and I fail to see that either he or I have done any wrong."

"You do not understand," Nigel answered coldly, "I hope Llewellyn, this will not occur

again; I shall see you later on. Come Chris," and he drew her away.

At first she looked resentful; but presently her face cleared, and she asked,—

"Why are you angry, Nigel? Have I done something shocking?"

"Not *shocking*," he answered half smiling, "but very unusual. Young ladies do not as a rule go boating with men they have known but a few days, and without a *chaperone*. Mrs. Grundy—"

"Oh, bother Mrs. Grundy! She crops up at every turn. I do try hard to please you and aunt but I never succeed. Nigel, I think it might be easier if you would let Lola come down here awhile. She is older and more staid than I—and I would not want any other friend."

"You ask an impossibility, and forget what is due to yourself and us."

"Whatever I forget, may it never be true friendship given me so freely," she retorted.

### CHAPTER III.

PERHAPS it was just because Chris wanted to stand well with Nigel that it so happened he always saw her worst side. If ever she engaged in some piece of mischief with Dave as aider and abettor, Nigel was sure to come upon them; if ever she relapsed into slang Nigel was bound to be present, and the contemptuous look in his dark eyes went like a knife to her soul.

She had long ago given up all endeavour to please her aunt or win her affection. Mona she disliked and distrusted, and as Nigel never sought her society, she was thrown very much upon Dave. For him she had a hearty warm affection, and she never reflected that perhaps one day he would ask more than she could give.

Nigel, watching, thought "she is a very skilful flirt or most ingenious; I wonder which. What a relief to me should she choose to marry Dave!"

It was now late in August, and Chris had gone on one of her long rambles with her friend, without staying to consult her aunt. Now they sat by the riverside, under a wide-spread beech, and Chris leaned her little curly head against the trunk, and closing her eyes gave herself up to the languorous delight of the lazy weather.

"How drowsy it is," she murmured, "it's too hot even for the birds to sing; Dave, you must do all the talking, tell me a nice story."

The young fellow's frank face flushed.

"What subject shall I choose?"

"Oh, any—it is quite immaterial. I only want to be amused."

"And I want you to be something more than amused," he stammered, "and you must pay good heed to me. Once upon a time—"

"Ah, that dear old 'chesnut,'" murmured the girl. She never stayed to pick and choose her words for Dave. "Go on—once upon a time."

"If you interrupt I cannot 'go on.' Well, there was a girl very young and very pretty, she was as bright and good as she was beautiful."

"If she comes out of a Sunday school book, you need go no further," interrupted Chris, "I know the sort. She wouldn't wear a bang, and she would turn in holy horror from any amusement; she preaches to people who are older, wiser, better than she."

"You're out of it altogether; she wasn't at all that sort of girl. She was full of merry ways, and it was a pleasure to hear her laugh, it was so gay and musical. Well, she had a lover, and he would almost have died for her I believe, but he was afraid to speak because he was very poor and she just the reverse, so he vexed himself every hour of the day with the fear that she might never be his."

"Well, the girl being rich it didn't matter about his poverty. I don't think I like your hero much; he seems a bit cowardly."

"But if he had spoken the girl might have said, no, and perhaps he would have lost her friendship—that was something to have—and then plenty of people would have been ready to say, he married her not for herself but for her possessions."

"Oh," loftily, "if he stayed to consider what 'people would say,' he must have been a very foolish fellow; he couldn't expect to please everybody. Now, if I had been in his place, I should have gone to her and said—"

"Yes, you would have said!" questioned Dave, with ill-suppressed eagerness.

"I am poor whilst you are rich; but I love you very dearly, will you believe me, and be my own dear wife!"

"You mean that Chris? You give me courage to speak; dear, let it be in your own words. 'I am poor,' she suddenly opened her blue eyes wide, looking quite ready to laugh; but when she saw that he was in deadly earnest, she said, vexedly,—

"At least I would try to be original, and not learn a lesson parrot-fashion. I didn't think you would play me so low, Dave;" and she moved as though to leave him, only he took possession of her hand, entreating,—

"Chris, do hear me; I am a stupid blundering fellow, and I have so little to offer you that I was afraid to speak until I had learned something of your opinions on the subject. My dear, if you will only say you love me a little."

"I like you awfully," promptly, "but it was friendship I promised you; nothing was said about love, that was not included in the bargain."

"But why," he asked, miserably, "if you don't like me better than the other fellows did you single me out for your favours?"

"I didn't," indignantly. "You offered your society, and I thought you very kind and nice because nobody else seems to want me. Now you've spoilt everything; I might have known you would because you're a man."

"Thank you; have you anything further to say of the same pleasant nature, Miss Winfield? Don't mind how you hurt I am only a man."

The anger left her face, she laughed outright.

"You dear, stupid, savage, old boy! Miss Winfield indeed! How I am promoted! There Dave, say no more about it, let us forget your folly—shake hands."

But he was hurt and angry too.

"If I am useful only as a butt for ridicule I may as well leave you. No fellow in his senses would sink to the level of a laughing-stock."

"Then, before your senses quite desert you," retorted Chris, flippantly, "go!"

Without further parley he left her, and Chris sat staring into the water. At first she smiled, then she sighed, finally she cried a little because Dave's society had been very pleasant, and now she was afraid he would come no more. But love him! No, that could never be—her head drooped forward on her hands, and the colour mounted slowly to her babyish brow.

Deep in her heart lay hidden the secret—the one secret of her young life—and evidently it brought with it much sadness. Poor little Chris! She had led such a butterfly existence, she had danced along the way rough or smooth; but it was growing rougher than ever it had been before beneath the light, little feet; and some vague presentiment of this weighed upon her as she loitered by the river.

It was late when she returned home, and Mrs. Chandos was out; Nigel, however, was in the library when she went to get a book, and, as he looked up, she saw that his grave face was graver than usual.

He did not often voluntarily address her; but now he said,—

"Chris! Dave Llewellyn has but just left me. The story he told me was painful to me."

Her blue eyes dilated, her breath came hard and fast, and she grew very pale as she said,—

"Are you angry again? Do you think I should have said yes?"

"I expected that you would; you have given him so much encouragement. I am sorry to find that you are what I feared—a heartless coquette."

"I am not *that*," she answered, with a little touch of dignity, "and I did not suppose Dave would misconstrue my words and actions. In the old life, friendships between men and girls were possible—we were not always bent upon matchmaking."

She turned to go.

"If I have wronged you, Chris, I am sorry," Nigel began, but she broke in coldly,—

"It does not matter, you do not understand my ways, nor I yours; but under no circumstances could I marry Dave."

"You mean that there is some one else? I have no right to ask it."

She laughed scornfully.

"Oh, do not apologise; a girl like me is not supposed to have any nice feeling. Yes, there is some one else, but neither shall I marry him; for he will never ask me," after which startling speech she left him.

Dave sulked for a whole fortnight, and then gave in, humbly asking to return to the old footing, to which Chris consented on condition that he did not make "a stupid donkey of himself."

The months wore by, and Mrs. Chandos saw no least hope that her wish would be fulfilled. Nigel and Chris rarely met but they quarrelled, and he would hardly admit the vast improvement there was in the girl's speech and bearing. If the truth must be told, Chris seemed to take a delight in showing him the most reckless side of her nature. With all the strength of her heart she loved this man who was something more than indifferent towards her, for at times he positively disliked her.

She was so afraid he would guess the truth that she did all in her power to plague and anger him; but no one knew this, or how often the young heart ached, the pretty eyes grew dim as to herself she whispered, "I must love him always; but he will never know, and if he did he would not care."

Between Chris and himself Nigel had erected a great barrier, which took the form of a secret engagement with Mona.

The arrangement was much against his wishes or his principles, but the lady had said, "You must agree to my terms a little while, or I can promise you nothing. The time is not ripe for telling mamma. Dear Nigel, can't you be content when you have my promise?" and much more she said in the same strain, until he yielded. But to him those stolen kisses—those clandestine meetings—were bitter-sweet, and sometimes he was tormented by doubts of his sweetheart's absolute love and faith.

In March they went to town, Mrs. Chandos declaring it was necessary for Chris to be introduced. To Mrs. Llewellyn she confidentially remarked, "I want to rouse some interest in her in Nigel. I should like to make him jealous of the attention which will certainly be paid her, for then love will follow. She is very pretty, and has improved wonderfully. She is quite *chic*, and much better than half the American girls that come over here hunting for titled husbands."

So to town they went, much to Mona's chagrin, for the Llewellyn funds would not allow them to follow suit; and Chris was delighted.

She had been born and bred in London; but she saw it now from another point of view, and she entered into all the pleasures provided for her with the zest of a child.

Mrs. Chandos fondly thought she had forgotten old companions—old associations—but she was mistaken.

One day Chris drove out with a friend of her aunt's, Mrs. Chandos being too indisposed to accompany her, and as the smart equipage bowled along the Lady's Mile the girl cried suddenly,—

"Oh, Mrs. Langley! I must stop the carriage; you don't mind! I have just caught sight of a very old and dear friend."

The next moment she was signalling a young woman to join them. With every expression of gladness she obeyed, and the scandalised Mrs. Langley saw a plain girl, rather badly dressed and with artificially-coloured cheeks and hair.

"Oh, Lola!" exclaimed Chris, "how glad I am to see you; jump in! Don't you remember how we used to envy those who could ride? Well, you shall say that once, at least, you drove with the best of them down the Mile—"

"But, Chris! dear Chris! I am not fit."

Only Chris would not listen, and she chatted on gaily, quite oblivious of the curious glances levelled at her and her companion; and when the drive came to an end, thrusting her little well-

filled purse into Lola's hand, she kissed her good-bye.

"The girl has no shame," cried Mrs. Chandos, after a great scene with Chris, "she's unfit to be trusted alone."

#### CHAPTER IV.

MRS. CHANDOS sat with Nigel in the drawing-room of the flat they rented; she was very agitated and had evidently been crying. The young man's face was graver than usual, and his eyes were troubled.

"You are quite sure there is no mistake?"

"Quite; don't buoy yourself up with false hopes mother; it is best to face the inevitable. The Bounding Building Society, which we thought such a good investment, has proved a fraud; the directors a gang of swindlers. But things might have been worse, it might have been an unlimited affair; but we must leave for home at once, living in town is too expensive with our reduced means. At Binkley we can manage very well with a little economy, and you have the allowance with Chris for an indefinite period, that at least is a bright spot in the darkness."

Mrs. Chandos wiped her eyes with the corner of her lace handkerchief. "Nigel is there any chance that your uncle's wish may be fulfilled?"

"No, there isn't," bluntly, "we cordially detest each other. Pray disabuse your mind of that idea, mother. I hope when I give you a daughter she will be worthy your regard and affection."

"Well, if you don't choose a rich woman, you can't marry in my lifetime," urged the lady selfishly, "we could not bear any additional expense."

A gay voice, singing, broke in upon the momentary silence.

"He longed to say he would die for her; but how and where he could not tell, so he helped to carry her milking pail, and that did just as well."

Then the door opened and Chris entered.

A daintier little figure could not well be imagined than she in her pale blue gown, with faint pink hyacinths at her breast, in her hands; their heavy sweet odour filled the room as she advanced.

One quick glance showed her something was radically wrong "in the state of Denmark;" and with a swift apology for her intrusion, she turned to go; but Mrs. Chandos, who was loquacious and now most anxious to enlist her *little noirs* sympathy, and practical help said,—

"Don't go Chris. You must hear the truth; why not now? We are going back to Binkley before the week closes."

Watching her, Nigel saw a faintly regretful look steal into her blue eyes, then it disappeared as she said quickly,—

"Very well, I can be ready. I hope no trouble is taking you back so hurriedly and unexpectedly."

"Trouble, indeed! We have lost nearly all our money. We are quite poor—a good deal poorer than the Llewellyns."

Nigel winced.

"Is that all?" questioned Chris, brightly. "I thought somebody was dead, or something really serious had happened. I know what it is to be poor, but money can't make happiness—and why should you worry? I have more than I shall ever want; you shall share it with me."

Nigel started forward.

"No Chris, that cannot be—"

"I did not speak to you but to aunt," the girl retorted sharply. "You will let me help you, because, although you do not like me, we are relatives. You are all I have got, and you are welcome to every penny of my money if—if you will love me just a little, I am so lonely."

As she knelt there by Mrs. Chandos, her pretty face uplifted, her hands clasped, and all her flowers strewn about her, she looked so gentle, so infantile that Nigel's heart softened towards her. Her blue eyes were ready to overflow, and the spirited little mouth was very tremulous.

"Chris," he said, gently, "you are good indeed,

and although we cannot accept your generosity I thank you none the less heartily."

"I know what you mean," she answered in a low voice, "you cannot accept because I am not one of you."

"Indeed it is not that; but no man can accept charity from a girl—"

"It is not charity, and aunt is not bound by the rules which govern you."

"Listen to me, Chris. We are not paupers," smiling now, "we have enough for our wants, and now I shall have to find work, which will be a good thing for me. But none the less I thank you with a full heart; you are far better to me than I deserve." Then he crossed to her side, and stooping lightly, touched her brow with his lips.

To his surprise and dismay she burst into tears, and hid her crimson face up Mrs. Chandos' skirts.

"Go away, please," she sobbed, "I am so sorry for your loss—and so disappointed."

Marvelling much at this display of emotion, he obeyed, and the two women were left together.

"My dear," said the elder tearfully, "you are very generous, much more so than we deserve, and for myself I would take nothing; but just for Nigel's sake I am not proud—these reverses are doubly sad for him. Have not you guessed the reason of his seeming coldness to you?" (She could not be true even then, to this helpless, generous, trustful girl).

"No," said Chris under her breath, "why does he dislike me?"

"Dislike! Oh you little innocent; it is just because he thinks so much of you, that he appears so harsh, and he is jealous of everyone who approaches you. The fact is, Chris, the terms of your father's will angered him."

"As they well might. They were infamous—like my father himself."

Mrs. Chandos winced, but went on resolutely,—  
"He declared he would never agree to them, and then when he saw you he wanted to take back his words, but was too proud. He believed you would think he was a fortune-hunter, and he could not bear that, then, too, you always treated him very cavalierly."

"Was I to make advances to a man who seemed thoroughly to detest me? and, forgive me, aunt, I have thought all along that your last wish would be to see me your son's wife!"

She lifted her shamed eyes to the other's face. There was no trace of compassion there, as Mrs. Chandos answered, glibly,—

"I am a plain-spoken woman, Chris, and I will tell you all the truth. I was prepared to dislike you, and I did dislike you awfully, because I felt as though you had robbed my dear boy of his rights; and I did not wish you to call me mother; but your goodness of to-day has changed all that, and the confession poor Nigel made, has shown me my folly. Try to forgive me, dear child, and to think a little kindly of Nigel, he deserves it."

She was too prudent to say any more then, but she saw with satisfaction the flush deepen in her niece's cheeks, and a timid joy steal into her eyes.

She had inserted the thin edge of the wedge. She believed it would be very easy to compass a marriage between the cousins, and something new in the girl's manner led her up to this conclusion. She was still more hopeful when that very night she found a cheque for one hundred pounds upon her dressing-table, with a little apologetic note from Chris, that she would accept and use it for herself.

At the time appointed they returned to Binkley, and on their way to St. Chad's passed a luxurious brougham in which was seated a man of some sixty years, withered, ugly, repulsive.

"Who is that?" asked Chris with a shrug of her shoulders. "What a death's head at a feast he would be."

"That is Lord Warlock," answered Mrs. Chandos. "He is awfully rich, and a year ago it was rumoured he was in love with Mona."

"That was like most rumours, devoid of foundation," said Nigel, and his voice was so changed that Chris looked at him in astonishment. Then a little of the delicate bloom faded from her face, in the past few days a tender hope had crept



into her heart; but, now she remembered little words and acts all of which seemed to point to one conclusion, and that conclusion was that he loved Mona.

After dinner he disappeared, and instinctively she felt that he had gone to see her. She was right. He went at once to the Llewellyns and found Mona in the garden, she having been notified of his return.

To him she had never seemed so beautiful as now, when he had come to put her love to the test. He took her in his arms, there under the shadow of the chestnuts (for Miss Llewellyn had no intention of being discovered with her penniless lover), and kissed her passionately.

"Have you heard?" he asked presently, "have you heard of our trouble?"

"Yes; oh, Nigel, it is so dreadful! It makes it all so much more difficult."

"You mean," he said hoarsely, "that our marriage is further off than ever? That I am not to explain everything to Mrs. Llewellyn?"

"Nigel, how can you ask it now? It was bad enough before; but it is infinitely worse now. It would be madness for us to marry. You must see yourself I am quite unfit to be a poor man's wife."

He set her free; there was anguish in his dark eyes and on his face, but his manner was composed and stern.

"What am I to understand by that?"

"Oh, you must not be angry with me; I am most unhappy, but I hope I know my duty to mamma, and—and I cannot disobey her."

"Mona, you have done that often enough by meeting me clandestinely; your conscience has become remarkably tender of late. Tell me—you *shall* tell me—is there any truth in the rumour that Warlock is here to woo and win you—if he can?"

"You look so angry that you frighten me! Nigel, you ought rather to be very pitiful, for I have to sacrifice love to duty. Oh, don't hold my hand in so cruel a grasp. Lord Warlock spoke to mamma last night, and to-morrow he comes for my reply. We are both so poor, we cannot afford to indulge in love, although—although it is only I care for."

"Oh, yes," he said savagely, "you are of the order of 'The little lovers who curse and cry'; but I know you now for what you are. You will sell your soul for a mess of pottage, and flatter yourself into the belief that you have acted dutifully. In your own eyes you will be a martyr, a saint; but for all that you will tread life's measure gaily, fare sumptuously, and have all that your heart desires."

"And you," she cried, stung to the quick by his words, "you will marry Chris Winfield—not for love—and so recoup your ruined fortune."

"If I do, you have but yourself to blame. Why that poor chorus girl has put you to the blush, and yet her class is not usually considered unmercenary, she would have given me all that she had—"

"Because she loves you. You have only to ask and have. I wish you joy of your bride." She was so angry that she let him see more of her real nature than he wished, and she was infinitely shocked.

"You have no right to say that," he answered very coldly, "you insult her:" and turning on his heel he left her.

She shed some very bitter tears, because as well as she could love she loved him, and he was lost to her. She had almost decided to accept him openly (for the story of her mother's objection to the match was purely fictitious) when the report of his misfortune reached her, and then Warlock re-appeared on the scene, and with her love fled at the approach of ambition.

That night Nigel did not sleep. He was haunted by dead hopes, dead dreams, and dead desires, and was just in the mood for any folly.

## CHAPTER V.

ALL the next day he was so good to Chris that again she hoped, and almost laughed her former years to scorn. Kindness brought out all her most lovable qualities, and smarting from Mona's

treatment, Nigel found her sympathy and her society very pleasant. Chris had been taught in a different school to Mona, and she could no more disguise the fact of her happiness, than she could change her identity. She ministered to her cousin's wants, glad to do little services for him, she could almost have kissed his hands in gratitude that he allowed her to be his messenger and help. And remembering his mother's words and Mona's, he could but feel that they were true. Well, if the child loved him, why should they not be wed? It was her father's wish, and at least she was loyal; she had nothing to gain by such a marriage. After all the chorus-singer had put the proud, gently-nurtured beauty to shame. And whilst he brooded thus his mother went to him.

"Nigel," she said, "you must not think I have been blind all this while to the state of affairs between you and Mona. I am wiser than you believe, and I knew how it would end. Are you going to let the future Lady Warlock boast she has broken your heart? If you want revenge you can have it—by marrying Chris."

"Don't," he answered, hoarsely, "that thought was in my mind, and I feel such a cur. How can I offer the child an empty husk?"

"My dear boy, you are talking nonsense. Very likely if you had married Mona she would have made you wretched; she has a dreadful temper and she hates being poor. On the other hand Chris loves you, and after all she has good blood in her veins—if she had not you would be foolish to refuse such a dowry as she will bring."

"Mother, you are rousing the devil in me, let me alone, why should Chris bear the burthen of my poverty and disappointment. She deserves something better. I have no love to give her."

"She will be satisfied with so little; and surely you have learned love is a myth." Then she left him; but her words remained with him, and they bore fruit. In the evening he chanced upon Chris, sitting in a deep window; her little rounded chin resting in her hollowed palms, and her blue eyes full of dreamy happiness. Blushing furiously at his approach she yet made room for him beside her, and he could not blind himself to the fact that his coming gave her pleasure.

"I wonder what you were dreaming," he said, gently, "may I ask?"

"Oh yes, because my thoughts were about you and Mona Llewellyn; I was wondering why it was I imagined you—you cared for her; and was amused by my own stupidity. I used to think that you intended marrying her."

"Mona is the last woman in the world I would call wife," he answered truly enough, for knowing her now as she was, he despised her with all his heart, though as yet he could not say, "I do not love her."

As he spoke the colour flamed more brightly into the pretty face, the white, heavily-fringed lids drooped over the blue eyes, as Chris said,—

"Tell me what sort of woman you would wish to marry?"

He looked at her critically; she was very pretty, she had proved herself loyal and generous, he was even beginning to be very fond of her—she loved him. Well, as his wife she should be happy, and so after a brief struggle with himself he said,—

"My wife—if I could choose, should be *petite* and fair, with little curls of gold rippling all over a small proud head; she should be natural in ways and speech, gay and engaging in manner; and above all she should love me very dearly."

She tried to look up but failed; her breath came hard and fast, she felt giddy and blind with sudden hope, sudden, wild rapture.

"Do you know such a girl?" she asked under her breath, "or is she just an ideal?"

"I know her."

"Then if you love her, why do you not tell her so? Why torture yourself—and her?"

"Because Chris there is this barrier between us. I am poor, she is rich; she might believe that I sought her only for her money. Do you think she would?"

Suddenly she stretched out her hands to him; he took and held them fast.

"Oh no, no, she never could do you that injustice. Put her to the test."

"I will; Chris, little Chris, will you be my wife?"

She burst into tears as her face fell forward on his breast.

"If you will have me," was what she said, and lifting her drooping head, he kissed the tremulous lips, and perhaps even then he was nearer to loving her than he knew. But he could not utter loving words, passionate protestations. He simply sat with his arm about her, and she was content. But when she had grown calmer, and her native sauciness had returned, she said, coquettishly,—

"Why did you not tell me before? Did not you know I was just waiting for these words—and now (she had grown grave again), and now—thank Heaven, I may and can help you—all that I have is yours—take it, Nigel, as a thank-offering for your love."

His very soul shrank within him at her words; he was fain to cry out the truth to her, but she adored him, it would break her heart now to learn he had not sought her out of love, and so he held his peace; but never was man more humbled in his own esteem than he.

Oh, those happy, happy days! how often Chris looked back to them with eyes grown dim with tears, and a heart that ached with an intolerable load of anguish! how often in the "dead unhappy night" Nigel, tossing on his bed, wondered how he could have been so irresponsible to her love, and cursed himself for the misery he had brought upon her.

Now she was the gladdest of all the world's fair daughters. Not a doubt of Nigel's love crossed the girl's mind; he was so kind, so gentle, and she mistook kindness and gentleness for the grand passion. Poor little Chris.

They were to be married in October; Chris saying that she would not like the world to be quite bare of flowers and foliage on her wedding-day, because, though London-bred, she was an ardent worshipper of Nature.

In July Mona became Lady Warlock, and it hardly gave Nigel a pang as he read the announcement of her marriage.

Dave had gone away after offering very lachrymose congratulations to Chris, who openly laughed at him, prophesying that he would have a new divinity long before she was a wife—and perhaps because he felt it useless to harbour his passion for her—this prophecy was quickly fulfilled—Chris laughed again when she heard of his latest infatuation, and with an arm about Nigel's neck, said,—

"Poor silly boy! of course, I liked and like him still; but you see, dear, he is as unstable as water, and having known you, I could not be content with a lower standard of manhood. Not all the world dear Nigel, were it leagued against you could convince me you were other than loyal and true—only by your own words would I condemn you."

What a guilty wretch he felt then. If only she loved him, trusted him less how much easier it would be to bear, how much lighter would his rôle of lover be.

He stooped to kiss her, and that kiss was full of remorse.

So full was his mind of the girl and the wrong he was doing her, that that evening he felt compelled to confide in his mother, unsympathetic as he knew her to be.

Chris was supposed to be out. In reality she had returned from her solitary ramble, and intent upon startling Nigel, was creeping cautiously towards the library when her steps were arrested by the words (spoken in her aunt's voice):

"It was said of you once, Nigel, that you were too conscientious, and I know that is true now. Why can't you be content? You are fond of Chris and she loves you; is quite content with matters as they are—"

"But I am not, mother. I am doing her a gross injustice. She gives me of her best, her love, her life, her very fortune; and I in return give her, nothing more than a brotherly affection. Poor little soul, there are moments when I feel I must tell her all—only I would not wound her—there are times when I feel I am the biggest scoundrel under the sun. I wish to Heaven, I had never asked her to be my wife."

Still she stood white and dumb. He did not

love her—he was fond of her—one might be fond of a brute beast. Hark! what was that his mother was saying,—

"I hope you don't contemplate any rupture, it would be so unpleasant for all concerned. And as you cannot have Mona, why not make Chris happy at the cost of a little sacrifice of feeling! Without her fortune, we must drag out a miserable existence, and I was not born to poverty."

"Mother, for Heaven's sake think of the girl; is she never to be considered! I said truly that I would not make Mona my wife now, were she free and willing, but love such as I gave her does not easily die."

"Love such as I gave her," whispered the white lips of the listener, "I have never had his heart. Only out of pity and necessity he would marry me;" and she crept upstairs to her room.

When they sought her, she answered from behind her closed door,—

"I am lying down. My head aches, excuse me to Mr. and Mrs. Chandos;" and then she lay still upon her bed until the night came. Then she rose, and walking to and fro, gave voice to her sorrows.

"Not for myself, but my fortune he needs me. Oh Nigel! Nigel! are you then no better than other men I have known? Have you, dear, only Heaven knows how well—and you are fond of me. Can I be satisfied with the affection you might give to a favourite dog who licks your hand for any sign of it? Oh my heart—my breaking heart! And you have loved Mona all the while! Why did you so deceive me? Is poverty hard to you? I bore it uncomplainingly year in and year out; but then I was born to it. And you shall not suffer; neither shall your good fortune come to you burdened by a wife. If I do not marry you you cannot touch my wealth unless I die. Well then, I will die!"

She sank on her knees by her bed and prayed.

"Give me strength; show me the way. I am heartbroken and bewildered; but let me have grace to give myself for his happiness. No one needs me, and he can do great things."

Long she knelt, and when she rose her face was the face of an angel in its lofty courage and self-sacrifice.

Much later she gathered together a few golden coins, two or three notes, and some loose silver. Then she waited for the morning.

It dawned bright and beautiful though cold. With chill fingers she dressed herself and crept downstairs. No one was about but a sleepy housemaid, to whom Chris said, "I am going for a walk. If I am late, please tell Mrs. Chandos not to keep back breakfast;" and so she passed out of St. Chads.

In the highway she paused a moment to look back, whilst a little sob lifted her throat, "good-bye for ever," she said "it is best that I should go."

## CHAPTER VI.

THE girl's message neither surprised nor startled Mrs. Chandos and her son. Chris was wont to be erratic, and no one now questioned her actions; but when the morning wore on and she did not return, a vague sense of alarm stirred Nigel's heart.

But he said nothing until a maid entered with the information that Miss Winfield's bed had not been disturbed, and that, although she missed nothing from the wardrobe, it was evident that it had been thoroughly overhauled, whilst her davenport was open and empty.

Before mother or son could reply or do more than look their fear into each other's eyes, another maid brought in a note which she said had been delivered by a carrier, who told her he had "got it from a young lady."

Hastily tearing it open, Nigel read,—

"I know all, and whilst I thank you for your goodness I wish with all my heart you had not thought it necessary to deceive me."

"Living you I leave you. I will not be the one to drag you down to misery. I hope that your blessing may be in my flight. I feel that I shall not be long on earth, and then dear Nigel

you must take the whole of my fortune without the encumbrance of an unsuitable wife."

"I have been very happy; and for that I thank you again, asking you when I am gone to think sometimes of the poor ignorant girl who loved and blessed you with her last breath. Goodbye."

"Mother!" he said, hoarsely, "for Heaven's sake help me to find her. Think of her so pretty, so lonely, cast adrift, with not a soul to speak a comforting word to her. If harm comes to her I never can lift up my head amongst honest men."

"How absurd you are! Because she is jealous and so has gone away, are you to blame! My one regret is that you cannot touch a penny of her fortune whilst she lives, unless you can find her, and persuade her to renew your engagement."

"And my own regret," he answered, heavily, "is that she is gone. Curse the money, with all my heart I wish it at the bottom of the sea; for even if I find her she never will believe that I seek her for herself alone."

"You must find her. Nigel, I don't think you are very far from loving her!"

"I don't think I am, although had you said that but yesterday I should have laughed the idea to scorn. Poor little Chris! dear little Chris! oh, what an infernal blackguard I am!"

What was to be done? Where were they to begin their search? Of course the girl's flight could not be hidden, it was very soon county talk.

Some said she had been coerced into an engagement with Nigel, and at the eleventh hour her courage failed her. Others averred that she had run off with a low-born, disreputable lover, "and what else could one expect from a girl of her training!"

But no one dared breathe one word against her fair fame in the presence of Nigel, who seemed suddenly to have grown old with the weight of this added trial.

He sought for her personally. He employed detectives, advertised largely; but his efforts were not crowned with success. Night after night he lay wakeful and weary, filled with a vast horror at the thought of her probable fate.

She had written, "I feel I shall not be long on earth;" and to him those words conveyed a menace. In her misery and despair she had probably taken the life given her; and if so was he not her murderer? Could he ever touch one penny of the fortune which, in such a case, would be his? A thousand times no!

He would rather starve than handle what he felt was blood money. He never knew until she was gone how much she had contributed to the brightness of the house, to his own happiness and material comforts.

He thought of her until he longed for her, and longing grew to love. There was no one now to dance merrily to meet him as he entered the house. No one to whisper a word of welcome, to shyly add "how lonely and horrid it was with him away."

His individual tastes were no longer studied, his books and papers were in sad disorder, and his mother grew daily more lugubrious, "because," as she said, "if the girl does not return to us I shall lose my allowance, and Heaven knows I lack many a luxury now—luxuries, Nigel, are necessities to me, with my enfeebled constitution—not that you care. I must say that for downright selfishness you and Chris would not easily be equalled."

He was too galled and wretched to respond, or even listen knowingly. To-night should have been a happy one. It was the eve of the projected wedding. Ah, Heaven, help him! all too late he had learned to value that despised jewel, and now! he rose, hastily.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried, "bruise me, crush me down to the earth, but let me go free from blood-guiltiness, bring her safely home even though her coming means ruin for me."

The next morning dawned fair and beautiful—their wedding-day. In her wardrobe he knew the bridal dress was hanging in all its fresh beauty. Every dainty accessory to her toilet was there—the bridal trappings were complete—where was the bride?

A letter lay beside his plate, it was all the more

conspicuous for being solitary; usually quite a sheaf of envelopes were stacked beside him. The envelope was a long narrow one—the sort now used by tradesmen for sending bills—the handwriting was an irregular scrawl. He thought it was a missive from one of the begging fraternity until he read,—

"DEAR SIR,—

"It is my painful duty to tell you that Chris died last Tuesday, and was buried to-day. It was her wish that you should know nothing about it till all was over. She came to me in her trouble and said she wouldn't stop, and I didn't give her my word to keep her secret. She lies in Highgate Cemetery. If you want to see her grave I can easily show it to you. She was a good girl, as was hard done by. Her last words to me was, 'Tell Nigel he's to take everything, and Heaven bless him! Say, too, that I loved him to the end.'—I am, sir, your very respectful servant,

"LOLA SMITH."

"Dead! Little Chris! Why, then, did he live! Dead! She, prettiest, merriest, most unselfish soul on earth! And she had died believing him cold and cruel. Oh, Chris! Chris!"

He flung out his arms, and, burying his face upon them, broke into hoarse and terrible sobs. Never before had he been so weak; never before had he known such cruel anguish.

Like one drunk with wine he rose at last and confronted his mother. She cried out when she saw his face, and clinging to him, prayed,—

"Nigel, what is it? What fresh calamity has befallen us? Tell me the worst, at once!"

"The worst is, that Chris is—dead—and—buried!"

Then, to his horror, he saw her face change, and its gloom lighten.

"Oh, Nigel! Of course I am sorry. But—but it is all yours, now! All her great fortune!"

With rough hands he put her aside. She was glad that Chris was dead!

He strode out of the house. He had but one idea—to seek her grave! To pray to those deaf ears for pardon. Chris, his little Chris! To think of that sunny head so soon brought low! Those blue eyes dim and closed for ever to the blessed light of day! The swift feet, the busy little hands motionless for ever. She had lived for him, died for him; and all her wealth was his! But, oh! to have back the dead days which she had made bright when he scarcely realised it.

Straight he went to town and sought out Lola Smith. The house was rented by the stage carpenter of The Imperial, who let it out in rooms to the humbler members of the company. It was a dingy place, and only moderately clean within.

Lola herself opened the door to him. She was dressed in black, and looked very sad and worn. Even now her eyes bore traces of weeping. She bade him follow her to her room, a large apartment divided by a curtain, and then she sat down, waiting to be questioned.

"Tell me all you can about her," he said brokenly. "There has been a terrible mistake all through. I never guessed that she was so dear to me until I lost her. What was her illness?"

"Fever. There was never any hope from the first. She was broken-hearted when she came to me, and she wanted to die. She said you would be rich and prosperous then, and she only wished your happiness."

He groaned aloud.

"Now, I would give all I have only to have her back. Why did not you send for me whilst she was still unconscious?"

"She made me promise to keep her secret until all was over. I could not break my word to her. I am only a poor, ignorant girl, but—"

"You have put us to shame. She could not trust us; she trusted you. Now, let me defray all necessary expenses, then we will go to her grave."

"There is nothing left to pay sir; she had plenty of money, and she told me to use it. Here is the account of the expenses, and I've got



five pounds left, which I'll be glad to give you now."

"No, no. I cannot touch it. Keep it in memory of her. What are these?"

"The undertaker's bill, sir, and the notice of her death. I thought you would wish to see them both."

He almost broke down as he looked at the brief newspaper report.

"WINFIELD.—At Marlborough Court, Kingston-road, Chris, only daughter of Alden Winfield, Esquire, aged nineteen. Interred at Highgate."

Nigel lifted his white face.

"Let us go!" he said. And they went out together, Lola crying behind her veil.

Half-an-hour later they stood beside a freshly-made grave.

"She sleeps there!" said Lola; and, at the sound of a heavy groan, turned and left him. When he rejoined her he was whiter than the white flowers loving hands had placed upon the neighbouring mounds.

In silence they walked on together. Then he said,—

"She must not lie there, like one dishonoured, in an unknown grave."

But Lola interrupted, swiftly,—

"It is her wish! Surely you, who grieved her so sorely, should not refuse to be governed by it. She said, 'Let me be forgotten. It is best for him, and best for all.'"

"Then, so far as lying in a nameless grave, she must be obeyed; but when I forget her, I, too, shall be dust, as *she is*. I want to thank you for your goodness to her, but I cannot tell how. You knew her better than we. Your love was more real and true. If—if there is anything I could do for you; if there is anything I dare offer—"

"There is *nothing*! Please do not press this upon me. I loved Chris, and I have lost her. But, if you would please her—because, somehow, I feel she will know—try to think a little more charitably of the poor girls, who, like her and me, have to earn their bread behind the footlights. We are not all bad. And we know how to lend a helping hand to a poorer one than ourselves!"

"I will remember," he said humbly. "I have learned many a lesson since Chris came amongst us. I should be glad if, sometimes, you would let me know how you fare. *She loved you!*"

## CHAPTER VII.

MRS. CHANDOS were most becoming mourning and received the condolences of her visitors with the regulation air of resignation. She knew that in their hearts they mocked at her assumption of grief, and would have offered "congratulation," had it been good form. But she gave no sign that she knew, as she talked plaintively of her heavy loss, and the dear girl's great delicacy of mind.

"She felt she was unfit by education and training to become Nigel's wife, and so she went away poor child. And just as I had grown absolutely fond of her. But depend upon it, this fever was on her, and she hardly was conscious of what she did."

Those who heard smiled sarcastically. Between mother and son the gulf was considerably widened; she had never understood him, and she regarded his unfeigned grief and self-reproaches with contemptuous pity, and wearying of Bunkley proposed that she should travel for her health (which indeed was excellent) and that she should invite Mrs. Llewellyn to accompany her, of course defraying her expenses.

Nothing pleased Mrs. Chandos more than to play the part of patron to her *confidante*, who, since Mona's marriage had been inclined to reverse their positions; and as Nigel felt it would be a relief to move and act accordingly to his own wishes, unhampered and unwatched, he readily consented.

All affairs had been quickly settled; a lawyer had made necessary inquiries, and learned that three girls had resided for a few days at Marlborough Court, two of them were sisters, Lola and Minnie Smith, the other was Chris Winfield, who, being attacked by fever, succumbed to it as the doctors certificate showed.

Minnie Smith had left for Birmingham the day after the funeral, but Lola remained, being still engaged at The Imperial; both undertaker and doctor described the dead girl as *petite*, fair, and pretty—oh, there was no shadow of doubt as to her identity, and so Nigel came into her fortune, his first act being to provide amply for his mother, who lost no time in following out her original plan.

Then Nigel went to town. Life had now an object for him; he had come into great wealth by what seemed almost murder to him. He must make atonement for all the sorrow and suffering he had brought upon Chris. He would use part of what once was hers, in behalf of the class amongst which she was reared. So he became a sort of lay missionary among ballet girls, chorus singers and supers; until, in dingy streets and lanes where they resided, his face was familiar and welcome.

He did not preach to them; it was not in Nigel's nature to do that; nor did he offend the most sensitive by his charity. He found little delicate ways in which to help them, and which none could repulse; he found, too, much that saddened and shocked him. There was open vice to contend with; there were drunkenness and improvidence; dirty, slipshod habits, and an attitude of "come day go day," with most of them. But he discovered humble heroes and heroines; pale girls working through the long day with the needle, dancing at night to support an aged parent or little sister; women with idle, spendthrift husbands, earning a scanty crust for the helpless babes at home; more than one man with a sick wife or child depending upon him for support, toiling all day for a little wage, spending the hours so sorely needed for rest as a super—not hard work that you will say—but then you forget this or that man had begun his toilsome day hours before you left your downy bed, that his wage was small, and that he fared poorly; all the more so because of those cheap dainties (not cheap to him) which the invalid or crippled one craved.

Amongst such people as these Nigel was spending his life, his strength, his means, and but for that heavy thought "*she* does not know my sorrow and atonement," he would have been far from unhappy.

His mother and his friends called him a dreamer, an enthusiast; his enemies said he was mad. But he did not heed them, because always before him was the loving face of little Chris, always in his ears rang the dear, sweet, voice, bidding him not faint on the way he had chosen, or fail in his good work. Often he went to Highgate, and as often as he went he found Lola's modest tribute to the dead girl's memory; a few flowers, nicely arranged, and invariably tied with white ribbon left upon the grassy mound.

It hurt him that in accord with his little love's wishes, he might not place a head stone there; but he had purchased the tiny plot of ground, and surrounded it with tiles, so that it was left sacred to them. But it hurt him more than anything beside to find that Lola persistently avoided him, and that her manner, when they chanced to meet, was very constrained and formal.

"No doubt," he thought, "she blames me for all that has passed, and I deserve it; but just because she was *her* friend, I wish it were otherwise."

One day he chanced upon her at the grave. She was carrying a small basket of pansies which she had arranged with greatest care and nice taste.

"You are very good to remember her so faithfully," he said, in a low voice, "and I cannot thank you sufficiently."

Her colour rose, even through the rouge upon her cheeks.

"One does not easily forget them that were dear (at times Lola's grammar was remarkably faulty) "it is the least I can do."

"But it is much," he answered earnestly, "I am frequently uneasy when I think—pardon me—how ill you can afford to purchase flowers so often—will not you strike a bargain with me. I will procure the flowers, you shall arrange them; that is a fair division of labour."

To his dismay she burst into tears.

"No, no, no; it is all I can do, and I *must* do it. It is my only pleasure, do not try to take it from me."

"It shall be as you wish. But Lola—I may call you that? she always did—there is one thing I would ask of you. Why do you always avoid me on every possible occasion? Are you angry because I—I was such a blind fool I did not guess her worth till she was gone?"

"No, oh no! But there are some things I cannot tell you; I wish with all my heart I could; and she said you wasn't to blame. I wish—"

"What do you wish?" he asked, as she paused in confusion.

"That I had sent for you unknown to her; all might have been different."

"How so? I perhaps could have given her some little comfort, but I could not have fought death successfully, and you say that from the first she was doomed. By your own sorrow you will gauge mine; surely a mutual grief should make us the best of friends."

"No," said Lola decisively, "that can't be; girls like me don't have *gentlemen* friends; you see people would talk (she was used to calling a spade a spade) and that won't do. I'm only a poor girl, sir; but my character's as much to me as are great madams; and—and I rather not see you often—you mind me too much of *her*."

"It must be as you wish, Lola; but at least you can promise me one thing, if ever you need a friend, come to me; I shall never forget your love of, and goodness to her," and then they parted, he remaining behind, watching her go with thoughtful eyes. And whilst he stood there under the shining sky, alone with the quiet dead, a far different scene might have been witnessed in the distant city of Liverpool; oh, for a magician's wand to transport him there!

It was in a large building of gloomiest nature, that numbers of girls and women sat at work; dirty rough work it was, too, for this place was a sack factory, and the *employés* were paid on what is called the "piece system;" that is they received a certain sum for each sack made or mended, consequently the most skilful "hand" drew the largest sum of money when Saturday noon arrived. They were a rough, coarse, untidy lot, and their language was frequently unfit for ears polite; occasionally two of them would quarrel, and only the foreman's intervention prevented an open fight. But amongst them all there was one who, though with them, was not of them; she was little and fair, she would have been very pretty but that her eyes were so sad, and her cheeks so wasted and wan. She sat apart from the rest, her neat, though shabby dress, forming a marked contrast to theirs, her whole bearing being above her position. They called her Lady Jane, because of her reserved and superior manner; no one knew really who she was, or from whence she came, and certainly no one liked her, because she held herself so resolutely aloof.

"Lady Jane don't think none o' us fit to black her shoes," said one, tossing her untidy head, "lor' miss, who might you be when you're to 'ome!'"

This sally was met by a burst of laughter; but the girl seemed hardly to hear either the speech or subsequent merriment. She went on sewing apathetically, slowly, for "Lady Jane" was the most unskilful *employée* there; it was a marvel to the women how she contrived to live on her scanty wage, and to rent that one poor, small room, she called home.

"She might be comfortable," they said, discussing her, "if she'd share her lodgin' with another—but not *she*—us aint good enow to breathe the same air as *her* does."

Sometimes when they goaded her almost to desperation by their coarse taunts and sneers, she would lift her pathetic blue eyes to theirs with something like entreaty in their depths; and one little, well-shaped, but toil roughened hand would steal up to her brow, as though she vainly hoped to win ease from pain and memory; but she never answered taunt with taunt, or revilings with complaints. And just because in this she was so unlike to them, the women hated

her the more. A red-haired girl was the only one who ever showed her any kindness. It was a very hot morning, and "Lady Jane" had all but fainted over her work; the red-haired one took a medicine bottle out of her capacious pocket, and thrusting it under the other's very nose said with rough cordiality,—

"Drink; it ain't nothin' only a drop o' rum; it'll do yer good, I'll bet."

With feeble hand "Lady Jane" put it back, "you are very kind, but if you please I would rather not—don't be angry with me—"

"Lor'! who's riled? I ain't; there's all the more for me," laughing, "but yer look as though yer wants summat to put life into ye; there ain't a handful on ye, an' ye're as white as a bit o' chiney."

## CHAPTER VIII.

Who shall say that the creed of the fatalist is without ground. A week after Nigel's meeting with Lola, business of a most unforeseen, unexpected nature compelled him to visit Liverpool. He was rather annoyed by it, as it took him from his sphere of work; but had he not obeyed the summons it is probable that his life would have been empty of love and joy for ever; and that another would have prematurely found a resting-place in God's acre.

It was a very bright day in July when he reached the city, and flower girls with their large baskets were very much *en evidence*, persecuting him with entreaties to purchase. But he was too busy to dally, he wanted to get back to town that night, and so hurried on to the office of the man who had desired to see him.

It was twelve o'clock when he reached the city. It was just a little after one when he emerged from his friend's, and, feeling the need of food, looked about for a suitable hotel.

All the factories were now disgorging themselves of their people. The women from Messrs. Holt and Funge's sack factory ate their dinners outside on sunny days; in the building if it rained or was cold, for most of them came from a distance.

It was only "Lady Jane" who did not observe this rule. At the striking of the clock, she would rise, and, taking her little basket, go out, and none knew where she went. Had they chosen to follow her, they would have seen her invariably walk in the direction of a churchyard, now laid out as a recreation ground. There on a bench she ate her frugal meal, except when it was very cold and wet, when she walked to and fro until a neighbouring clock chimed a quarter to two.

To-day she went in the old direction, but her feet lagged, and her senses seemed to swim. When she reached her usual "dining-room," she was too faint and weary to eat her stale bread and fragment of cheese.

She sat down and rested with closed eyes, and so white a face that one or two old people sunning themselves among the flower-beds looked askance at her, fearing that "something was wrong with her." But nobody spoke to her, and at the usual time she rose to go.

All the world spun round with her, there was a mist before her eyes, and her heart beat so heavily it almost suffocated her. "It is coming at last," she thought, in a vague, apathetic way. "It has been very long. I hoped I should have died before, but I am young and I used to be so strong. Strange to think of that old me—dead and buried—out of sight, out of mind! Soon I shall say good-bye to the world, and he will be secure. I wonder if he missed or grieved for me just a little, or if in his secret heart he was glad?"

She was crossing a road, and, wrapped in her thoughts, was oblivious of all around; she neither heard nor saw an approaching cab. She hardly heeded the shouts of the bystanders; the horse was going swiftly, and not all the driver's efforts availed to prevent what followed.

"Lady Jane" fell under the animal's hoofs—a shudder passed through the crowd—one woman said fervently, "Heaven be praised! the wheels have not touched her." The next instant the cab was brought to a standstill, and a gentleman sprang out.

The people made way for him to pass to that slender figure lying so awfully still and rigid.

"Stand back! give her air!" he said, authoritatively; and then, kneeling down, he gently raised the heavy head, turning the face upwards. He almost dropped his burden when his eyes rested upon it, and cried aloud,—

"Good Heavens! it is Chris!"

He was so white, so shaken, that the landlord of the adjacent publichouse ran in, returning quickly with brandy.

"Drink it, sir! it won't do you any hurt; it's easy to see you've had more than an ordinary shock."

Mechanically, Nigel thanked and obeyed him, and, feeling nerved, lifted Chris in his arms, whilst the cabman asked,—

"Shall I drive her to the hospital, sir; she seems hurt bad?"

"No! oh, no! Is there no place where she could lodge and be quiet near?"

"There's my sister lives over the road, sir," volunteered the publican. "She's got a couple of rooms empty; and, as there are no other lodgers, the young woman would be well looked after, especially as my sister was a nurse before she married."

"Take me to her; and you (to the cabman) go for the nearest doctor. Tell him to make all speed."

Ten minutes later the crowd had drifted away, and Chris was lying unconscious in Mrs. Preston's best bed, with the doctor bending anxiously over her.

"Concussion of the brain," he said, after a brief examination. "There are no broken bones, and very few bruises, but it will go hard with her; she has evidently suffered months of privation. I will not promise to pull her through, but we will see what our united efforts can achieve—eh, Mrs. Preston?"

Then they went down to Nigel, who was waiting the verdict in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

Having heard the doctor's opinion, he said,—

"I think it not only right but necessary to give you some account of myself and this young lady. She is my cousin and a great heiress, but, owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding, she left her home; and, shortly after, incontestable proofs of her death were brought to us, and we mourned her as one lost to us for ever. You will understand the terrible shock it was to me to find her still living and in evident poverty. Now, I can only implore you both to use your best efforts on her behalf; and if, Mrs. Preston, you could manage to give me a room I should be unfeignedly thankful. My cousin has no relation in England but myself, and I cannot leave her whilst she lies in this precarious condition."

Mrs. Preston thought a moment, then she said, "Well, sir, I can share the young lady's room and you might have mine, with the best parlour; and as for doing my best, you may rely upon me;" then she followed the doctor into the passage to receive his last instructions and Nigel was left alone, in a state of utter bewilderment and confusion.

What did it all mean? How had the dead come to life? He had stood beside her grave, he had read the brief notice which told of her end—and now he found her still above the earth, owner of thousands, yet wearing the garb of poverty with every sign of want impressed upon her.

Yet it was Chris; from the first he had no doubt of her identity. There was the same pretty fair hair, the same delicate features, and just beneath the little curls upon the brow, a small, dark mole which had been an affliction to Chris in the days when she took delight in her beauty.

Slowly he went over the past step by step. He recalled the significant fact, that after death none of those who had previously known her, had looked upon her, save Lola. There was the certificate to be dealt with; well, the doctor had made it out in good faith. He had known the dead girl only as Chris Winfield; but she had left messages for him—at least, so Lola said.

Then he remembered suddenly that there had been three girls lodging together—one had gone to Birmingham or so it was reported—that

one must have been Chris. It was the other girl Lola's sister that died and was buried.

The mere word-description of her personality tallied with Chris Winfield's, and so the fraud had been successfully perpetrated.

He understood now all that had seemed strange in Lola's conduct, Her refusal to allow a stone to be erected, her rejection of all his offers of assistance, and her agitation when he spoke of her loyalty to, and remembrance of, Chris.

It was all very plain to him now. The child's heroic but mistaken sacrifice; her belief that she was utterly repugnant to him, that he merely desired to possess himself of her wealth—and loving him, she had resolved that he should have the sweets of life, whilst she accepted the bitter.

But what had brought to her this cruel pass? Why had she not returned to her old profession, which had at least provided her with food and raiment?

"Oh my darling, my darling," he thought remorselessly, "whilst I have fared sumptuously every day, you have been even wanting bread—all for my sake," and suddenly his head fell forward upon his outstretched arms and he wept the terrible tears of strong manhood.

Day after day they watched the life flickering in the feeble body. At times they believed her dead, and the heart of Nigel grew cold within him.

But at last there came a change, and the doctor said, "With care she will pull through;" but a strange apathy was upon her, from which nothing could rouse her.

She asked no questions, she did not seem to find it strange that she was in a new home, that kindly hands ministered to her, kind eyes looked down upon her; she hardly seemed to remember the past, and never spoke of herself.

"All this has got to be altered," said the doctor one morning to Nigel, "desperate cases call for desperate remedies. She shall see you; Mrs. Preston, please go back to your patient and say a friend is coming."

Not daring to disobey, but very much afraid of the effect of any agitation, the good woman went delivering her message faithfully.

"I have no friends," said the weak voice, listlessly. "I died to them long ago," and the feeble fingers plucked nervously at the tassels upon the counterpane.

Mrs. Preston signed to Nigel to enter. He did so softly, and stood just within the range of the girl's sight.

Slowly, as if compelled by some mysterious power, her head turned wearily upon its pillows, the blue eyes were unveiled; then with sudden strength she sat erect, crying with a loud voice—

"Go away! go away! I said good-bye to you ages back"—and then her strength failed her, she fell prone on the bed.

"Leave us," said Nigel; and doubting, wondering, Mrs. Preston obeyed.

Then Nigel, lifting the girl in his arms, asked—"How could you do it, Chris! Oh, how could you do it? Did you want to break my heart that you left me to solitude and remorse?"

"It was that you might be glad I went," she answered feebly; "and now all my suffering has been for nought. I wanted to die that you might be happy and prosperous—not burdened with a wife you could not love."

He groaned aloud.

"Oh, Chris! Chris! what a brute you make me feel!"

"There is no need for you to grieve. Soon I shall be dead in reality."

"No," he cried, "Heaven will not be so cruel as to take you from me now."

"Do you mean," she asked, "that you are not sorry to find me living?"

"I mean that had I not found you no other woman should have been my wife! Oh, Chris, my little darling Chris, all too late I found I loved you, more than life or wealth or all the world could give. Can you forgive me? Will you try to believe in my word?"

"Do you mean it?" she gasped, "really and truly? Ah! your eyes tell me that you do—Nigel—hold me fast, do not let me go. Now indeed I would live, and death seems so near," and in his embrace she fainted.



But there was no need for alarm. After this she began to mend; for hope and joy can do more than many mighty medicines.

Two days later she told him all her pitiful story.

"After I left Binkley I went to Lola. She was my only friend, and I found her in sore trouble, for Minnie was dying of fever. Then I thought how I could help you, and I begged the landlord not to give me away. When Minnie died I persuaded Lola to bury her in my name; at first she would not listen, but I told her that if she persisted in her refusal I would drown myself. So she gave way, and nobody suspected what I had done. It was strange to read the announcement of my own death in the papers, stranger still to feel that I had no part or lot in your life any more. Well, I went away, not to Birmingham as Lola thought, but I came here, and I tried for work. I dared not remain in town lest I should be recognised—and here, where I was unknown I could not get an engagement. So I took what was offered, and I used to pray every night and morning, and all day long, indeed, that I might die—and death was coming, though slowly, when you found me. Oh, Nigel, I meant to save you suffering, and I have made you sup sorrow. Can you forgive me? Can you still wish me for your wife?"

"Chris, having found you, it would be death to lose you. Kiss me, my heart's darling; let me hear you say that little as I deserve it you believe me."

"I believe you, Nigel; ah! how good it is to be safe in your arms."

So Nigel Chandos married his pretty cousin, the chorus-singer, and Mrs. Chandos professed herself delighted, especially as her daughter-in-law continued the grant Nigel had made her. Lola sailed for America with her husband—a respectable young artisan. They did not go empty-handed, and many a poor soul has cause to bless "the happiest couple on earth," as Chris protests she and Nigel are.

[THE END.]

## MR. LESTER'S TRUMP-CARD.

—:—

HE was a remarkably good-looking fellow—the nurses were all agreed upon that—one of those rosy, white-haired and white-whiskered men whose wholesome freshness seems to promise undying youth.

Along with his good looks and his mint of money, he brought to Doctor Mason's private hospital for eye diseases an awful infirmity of temper and a cataract on his left eye. "A perfectly beautiful cataract," was the house-surgeon's verdict; to which compliment the nurses knowingly added,—

"So lovely and ripe, you know."

His name was Mr. Godfrey Lester, and he swore like a pirate. The hall-boy dubbed him at once the "golden-demon," the last on account of his fiery language, and the first as delicately appreciative of the demon's handsome habit of paying for the privilege of swearing at him.

Mr. Lester's cataract was operated on at the appointed time, and an ordinary man would have been well in a month. But Mr. Lester wasn't ordinary. Indeed, he was set down in the annals of the hospital as being positively the worst patient ever admitted there, and it was ardently hoped that his like would never be seen again.

At first appearance it would seem that he was like that time-honoured personage who disliked what he didn't like more than he liked what he liked. For he hated the very idea of staying in bed.

"It was preposterous," he said, "just for a bad eye."

He hated the framework which had to be adjusted about his head to protect his eye, and which his impatient thrashing was sure to demolish at least twice each day. As for Nurse Maud, Nurse Alice and Nurse Beatrice, as charming a dulcet-toned trio as any man could wish

for, he openly declared their gentle ministrations utterly intolerable.

But it presently turned out that his likes were equally positive. For example, he liked a bath, a daily tubbing being part of his religion. Unhappily, a bath had been absolutely forbidden. He liked all sorts of impossible things to eat and drink, and, finally, he liked Nurse Madeline, first, last and all the time.

Since they could indulge him in nothing else, it was thought best to yield in the matter of Nurse Madeline. Indeed, it was a case of "needs must," for it was firmly believed that if it had not been for Nurse Madeline's soothing presence, blood would have been spilled within the æsthetic walls of Doctor Mason's hospital.

Even if Nurse Madeline had been handsome, which she wasn't, her good looks would have been quite thrown away as far as her temporarily blind patient was concerned.

She was what has been wittily described as worse than handsome: she was interesting.

Whether Mr. Lester's lack in the matter of sight made his remaining senses more acute to perceive his nurse's more subtle charms, or whether he just fell in love in the good old-fashioned way for no reason whatever, it is impossible to say; but, at any rate, he soon found himself in the novel position of desiring to please another before himself.

For Nurse Madeline he endured the framework about his head; that is, so long as she remained at his side. For her he had his daily toot with the man who should have given him his bath, but wouldn't, in a voice that did not pervade the entire building. For her he substituted "dumb" for "damn" whenever he could think of it in time.

"Fancy how having a cataract on one's eye shuts a fellow in on himself," said Mr. Lester, one day, to Nurse Madeline, doubtless with a hope of awakening her compassion.

It was Sunday afternoon, and the dying strains of the old hymn, "Come, Ye Disciples," floated up from the corridor below, where a male quartette was stationed. Every week they came to sing a little while for the patients. If Nurse Madeline had not been sitting with Mr. Lester, it would probably have taken four men to sit on him to keep him quiet while the singing was going on, for, as the hall-boy said,—

"His Nibs objects to hymns."

Therefore Nurse Madeline made all haste to reply,—

"Yes, indeed. And it gives one plenty of time to repent of things, too."

"Oh, the deuce!" began Mr. Lester, feverishly.

"That is—well—I mean, of course, no man is as straight as he might be. As a matter of fact, the thing that keeps haunting me as I lie here is one that I'm not sure calls for repentance. I wonder what you would think about it?"

"I should think," said Nurse Madeline, calmly, "that your very doubt convicted you."

"Oh, but wait!" exclaimed Mr. Lester. "You don't know how Don disappointed me, or what kind of a person she was."

"Well, what about Don?" asked Nurse Madeline, carelessly drawing the words as if to conceal a certain eagerness that all but struggled through them. "And who is she?"

"Heaven knows, I don't," said Mr. Lester, grimly. "She was Don's wife, I suppose. And I suppose I ought to repent because I didn't try to know her."

"And Don?"

Mr. Lester's grimness melted into a tender smile.

"Oh, Don! Well, he was my nephew. He died a few years ago, only thirty-two years old. He was a handsome rascal, but he was too fond of cards, and played too well—for a gentleman. He used to live with me, and, scamp though he was, I loved him. I settled him in business and tried to keep him at it, but when he told me he was thinking of marrying, I set my face against it and told him he must choose between the girl and me. You see, Don wasn't fitted for a good woman's husband, and any other sort wouldn't do anyway."

"Well, almost before I could turn around, Don was off to London, and I heard he had married

some actress, or schoolmistress, or something of that kind.

"A year later I got a telegram announcing his death and the date of his funeral. Poor old Don! Well, I went. I didn't see the widow, and I didn't want to."

"Of course, I ought to have made some inquiries about her circumstances, and so on. But I downright hated her, because I felt she had robbed me of my nephew."

"So I just said good-bye to Don, and made tracks for home. Pretty soon afterward I got a letter from the widow."

"Well, she didn't ask you for money!" piped up Nurse Madeline, with an odd air of defiance.

"Didn't she though?"

Nurse Madeline's eyes blazed.

"Well," said Mr. Lester, "she didn't call it that exactly, but it meant money all the same. She called it advice—advice about Don's monument. She thought I was a drivelling idiot, I dare say."

"Well, I wrote a pretty stiff answer to her, and that settled her, for I never heard a word more from her. But, last summer, I visited Don's grave, and the monument she wanted so much advice about struck me senseless with astonishment. If you'll believe me it was nothing but a little two-foot slab of marble with his name and age on it. Not a thing more. I expected to see something very ambitious after all the fuss she made. Naturally I set her down as a kind of a sneak at once. So, really, to give the devil his due, it is nothing but the kindness of my heart and my love for Don that keep me thinking of her at all. It's unreasonable to ask a fellow to repent of leaving such a woman as that alone. Now isn't it?"

"That's just like a man!" broke in Nurse Madeline, hotly. "Slip out of condemnation yourself and pile it on her. Why didn't you find out about her before you judged her? I know why. Because it would bring you in contact with her whom you had judged according to your own mean conception of her. You didn't want to like her, so you kept as far away from her as you could. Nothing to repent of, Mr. Lester! Well, listen to me and I will tell you what I happen to know about Don's death and his widow. It may improve your mind if it doesn't soften your heart. Nurses, you know," she went on rapidly, "have many ways of getting news."

Mr. Lester's astonishment at hearing Nurse Madeline discourse so glibly on Don and his affairs was too deep for comment. He just lay still and listened.

"You spoke of Don's weakness for cards," Nurse Madeline continued, excitedly. "Well, one night he urged a friend, a young artist named Bedford, to go somewhere for a game. Bedford refused at first, for he had forsworn cards, but he was too weak to hold out against Don's blandishments."

"They didn't play together, it happened but joined different parties. Don came out only a little the worse for his evening's amusement. But poor Bedford played and lost, and still played and lost, until all he owned was gone, and not only his own money was swept away, but hundreds belonging to another for whom he had that day sold a picture on commission. For a moment he seemed stupefied with despair. And then, gasping for breath, he fell dead at Don's feet. Heart disease, the doctor said. It was a terrible night in March, but Don spent hours in the wind and rain, rushing about here and there to do what he could for his dead friend, whose death, he felt, lay at his door. Within a week Don, himself died of pneumonia."

For just a minute Nurse Madeline's voice faltered. The man who listened would have given a small fortune to see her face at that moment. But he said nothing, and Nurse Madeline took up her tale again.

"He was out of his head most of the time, but his wandering mind showed there was good in Don in spite of all. His constant cry was for a monument. 'Don't forget it, Madeline; a monument to shield me from the reproaches of poor Bedford's orphaned babies. Put all we have in the monument, and then you must go to Uncle

Godfrey and tell him all, and he will care for you."

"Not very clear, this, perhaps, but Don's wife understood him. She invested every penny of the few thousands her husband left for the little Bedford children, who had neither father nor mother, nor any near relative to care for them."

"This, Mr. Lester, is Don's monument; a living one; the human expression of a desire to right a wrong. Don't you think it would have been worth while to give advice about such a monument as this? And then, leaving the children in the care of a suitable person, Don's widow went out into the world again to earn her living and find that sympathy among strangers which Don's uncle had withheld. And she was successful, too. She took up her old calling, which was neither that of an actress nor a school-mistress, but a nurse."

"What?" said Mr. Lester, excitedly. "Did you nurse Don?"

"Yes," said Nurse Madeline softly. "And I had a right to. I was his wife."

"Well, I'll be—"

But Mr. Lester didn't finish it, for, putting out his hand to touch Nurse Madeline, he found she had slipped quietly away. And then, exhausted by excitement, he fell fast asleep.

After that Mr. Lester grew rapidly better although it cannot be said that his temper improved likewise. Although the happy day arrived when he was allowed to take a bath, anything he liked to eat or drink and also the bandage removed from his eyes so that he could see Nurse Madeline's face, still he was not happy, for Nurse Madeline simply stared at him when he talked to her of love. If she did not stare in silence, she would still stare and say,—

"Do not excite yourself, Mr. Lester."

Everybody rejoiced when Mr. Lester was discharged as cured, that is, everybody but himself. As a matter of fact, they rejoiced too soon, for he wouldn't stay discharged. He kept coming back every day to ask to have his spectacles changed or to know "if there isn't one growing on the other eye" or to ask if something oughtn't to be "needled," a phrase he had picked up in the hospital, but of the meaning of which he was densely ignorant.

Not that it mattered, however, because he was perfectly willing to be stabbed even, if it would only bring him into Nurse Madeline's neighbourhood. Indeed, he became such an intolerable nuisance that the entire hospital force went down on their knees to Nurse Madeline and begged her to marry him at once, so they should be rid of him for ever.

About the nineteenth time of asking it happily occurred to him to offer an inducement along with his heart and hand.

"Only forgive me and marry me, Madeline, dear," he urged, "and—we'll adopt Don's monument!"

Mr. Lester had played a trump-card. He won his suit.

TATTOOING appears to be the rage among the Princes of the Blood in Europe, as well as some of the Princesses. The Grand Duke Alexis's right arm is adorned with a dragon which covers it almost entirely from the wrist to the elbow. The new Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha is tattooed much the same way, while the Duke of York has a couple of crossed flags upon his forearm. King George of the Hellenes, his second son, and his nephew, the Czarewitch, are each of them tattooed. Beside these, there are among the tattooed Princes, Queen Margherita of Italy's brother, the Duke of Genoa, Archduke Stephen of Austria, and Prince Henry of Prussia, brother of the Emperor William. Princess Waldemar of Denmark, wife of the sailor son of King Christian has a beautiful anchor and a crown tattooed on her arm, half-way between her shoulder and her elbow, and which, of course, is conspicuous whenever she wears a low dress. Her husband, likewise, has naval emblems tattooed on his arm, and so, too, has King Oscar of Sweden, who served for many years in the navy before ascending the throne. His sons have followed his example.

## FACETIE.

"DOES Switzer speak German at home now?" "No." "Speaks English, eh?" "No." "What, then?" "Nothing at all; he's married."

MR. STALATE: "Won't you sing something, Miss Minnie!" Miss Minnie (yawning): "Why, Mr. Stalate, don't you know it is considered unlucky to sing before breakfast!"

ALTO: "What sort of a range has the new tenor in our quartette?" Basso: "Sort of a mountain range, I should say." Alto: "How do you make out that?" Basso: "It's 'rocky.'"

HE: "I like the room, and I think I shall take it, but I hope no one in the house plays the piano!" Landlady: "Only my youngest daughter, and she's only just beginning."

SUFFERER (to consulting physician): "My chief complaint is a terrible sleeplessness." P. (jocularly): "Well, I have heard that a sermon of the Rev. Trite Weaver is an excellent panacea." "Unfortunately, I am the Rev. Trite Weaver."

"YOUR daughter has a remarkably pretty foot, Mrs. Snaggs," said Mrs. Bloomfield to her friend. "Indeed she has," replied the grateful mother, "and I have decided to let some good sculptor make a bust of it."

"No, she hasn't spoken to her next neighbour for a month." "Did the children make the trouble?" "No, she told what she paid for her new bonnet and the neighbour never repeated it."

CONSTANCE: "Did he not go home after you refused him?" Clare: "No. He staid right on and said: 'All things come to him who waits.'" Constance: "And what came?" Clare: "Father was the first."

TOMMY (who has been studying with but poor success): "Dad, my teacher says that history repeats itself. Does it?" Tommy's Father: "Yes, my boy, sometimes." Tommy: "Well, I wish mine would repeat itself, 'cause I can't do it."

SERAPHITA: "What do you do when a man persists in asking for a dance, and you don't care to dance with him?" Angelica: "Tell him my card is full." "But supposing it isn't, and he still persists?" "Then I insist that it is, and let him see that it isn't."

A SINGLE word sometimes reveals a man's inmost thought. "Who are those girls playing four-handed pieces on the piano?" asked one man of another at an evening party. "One of them is the daughter of the hostess," was the answer. "And who is her accomplice?"

"Do you think the human race is improving?" "It is at least growing in the quality of self-control." "How do you make that out?" "Well, in the days of Henry VIII., for instance, a man was more apt to lose his head than he is now."

"It's a heavenly day for a walk," he said, rejoiced at having got her to himself for a few minutes. "Yes, indeed," she answered. There is Jack Wilkins over on the piazza. Go over and ask him if he won't take me for one—will you, Mr. Borely?"

INDIGNANT CUSTOMER: "I sent you a number of new collars last week, and when they came back they were all frayed and ragged." The Laundry Lady (sympathetically): "Lor' now, sir, it's too bad. It's surprisin' what inferior goods some shops turn out, isn't it?"

FRIEND: "What a perfectly lovely dress you wore last evening—the very latest Parisian style, too, only received two days ago. Your dress-makers must be wonderfully quick. Where did you get it made?" Miss Bangupp: "My grandmother found it in my great grandmother's old trunk."

SHE (before impressionist picture): "What a beautiful painting!" He: "Um!" She: "So truthful; such feeling!" He: "Um!" She: "You can almost—ahem—almost feel that you are there!" He: "What is it supposed to be a picture of?" She: "Er—I don't—I think—just let me look at the catalogue."

MAUD: "Didn't you faint when you got into that terrible crush in the theatre passage?" Irene: "Faint! No. There wasn't room."

AN Irish journal has this gem in answer to a correspondent: "We decline to acknowledge the receipt of your post-card." Which is very much like the Corkonian who travelled into Kerry to an insulting enemy to "tell him to his face that he would treat him with silent contempt."

DOCTOR: "You look rather excited. For some time to come you had better not exert yourself too much. For instance, you must not—what is your profession?" Patient: "Anarchist." Doctor: "You must not throw bombs, do you hear?"

AUNTIE: "Do you find your lessons hard?" Little Nephew: "Some of them is; but spellin' and pronunciation is easy." "They are?" "Oh, yes. All you have to do is to pronounce words the way they isn't spelled, and spell 'em some way they isn't pronounced."

SCENE—an Alcove. Scion of a noble house to desirable Yankee Girl: "I have led you away from the giddy, thoughtless throng, Miss Van Porque, to pour into your ears an old, old story—" "Waal, I guess I'll see myself everlastingly fried before I lose supper or dancing to listen to any chestnut. You can just take me back to mommer."

"I AM not expecting any package," said the lady of the house. "This is the number," persisted the driver of the delivery waggon, looking at his book again. "Name's Higgins, ain't it?" "Yes." "No. 374?" "That's our number." "Then it's for you." "I think not. It must be a case of mistaken identity." "No, mum. It's a case of beer."

A FARMER's son up in the country conceived a desire to shine as a member of the legal profession and undertook a clerkship in the office of the village pettifogger at nothing a week. At the end of the first day's study the young man returned home. "Well, Tobe, how do you like the law?" was the first paternal inquiry. "Tain't what it's cracked up to be," replied Tobe. "Sorry I learnt it."

THE colour-sergeant was calling the roll of the company on commanding officer's parade, when it was noticed that Private Fitzgerald did not answer to his name. "Fitzgerald!" shouted the non-commissioned officer three times, without receiving a reply. "Why do you not answer to your name, Fitzgerald?" inquired the captain. "Shure, sor, me and the sergeant's not on spakin' terms," was the unexpected reply.

A GENTLEMAN travelling on the Great Northern Railway, having delivered his luggage to the care of the porter, made himself comfortable in the corner of a carriage. The porter came to the carriage for the "reward of merit." "Well," said the gentleman, "I see by the letters 'G.N.R.' on your cap, 'Gratuities never received.'" "A little mistake, sir," replied the porter. "It should be, 'Gratuities never refused.'"

A FUNNY story showing great pluck and coolness on the part of an old Scotch woman. A ruffianly looking tramp appeared one day suddenly before her cottage and wanted money. "Did anybody see you come in here?" asked the woman. "No," said the man. "Then deil a one shall see you gang out! Lassie, bring me the axe!" The tramp on hearing this thought "discretion the better part of valour," and instantly decamped.

A MINER's wife in the North rushed into her sister's cottage with an unopened telegram, exclaiming in agony, "Oh! Kate, Kate, mother's dead! Mother's dead!" (The only telegram she had ever seen before announced the death of her father.) Ka'e fell on her sister's neck, and the two women, locked in each other's arms, continued moaning and crying, "Oh! mother's dead! mother's dead!" and refused to be comforted until the husband of one returned from his work at five o'clock, and, opening the telegram, which he snatched from the grief-stricken woman, read: "Jack will arrive at 4.10. Meet him at the station." Poor Jack!



## SOCIETY.

THE Duchess of Albany has been advised to spend the winter in the South of France.

PRINCE ALEXANDER OF BATTENBERG was one of the most unpretending and amiable of men; but at the same time, a very brave and high-spirited soldier.

THE Princess of Wales always sends word to those who wish to present her with bouquets as to the size and weight of the presentation. The rose is her favourite flower.

THE Lady Mayoress of York is the only mayoress in England who wears an official chain. At the beginning of the seventeenth century a chain was presented to the then lady mayoress, and it has been handed down ever since.

THE Russians want to have a Pantheon built at St. Petersburg, so that the capital on the Neva may have as fine a place for sepulchre of the illustrious dead as the metropolis on the Seine.

It was not generally known that the late Prince Alexander of Battenberg and Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria were warm friends, and carried on a brisk correspondence. Prince Ferdinand has given 10,000 francs towards the national monument which is to be erected to the memory of Prince Alexander in Bulgaria.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught are already as great favourites at Aldershot as they were at Portsmouth, and the Duke is astonishing every one by his capacity for hard work and his ability in every department of his command. The Duchess, who has the kindest and gentlest of dispositions, does not show to advantage on first acquaintance, but those who see most of her Royal Highness like and admire her without stint.

THE Emperor of Russia has decreed that Siberia is to cease as a Russian penal colony. A new place of exile, known as the "Hell of Saghalin," has been found. People that are not students of geography do not know the Island of Saghalin or Saraki; but it is not entirely unknown to the "criminal" world of Russia, for before now exiles have been transported thither, whose hopes of returning to their country practically ended when they landed on its shores.

PRINCE ALEXANDER OF BATTENBERG after his morganatic marriage, was known as Count Hartenau. He was one of the handsomest men in Europe, and his manner was most fascinating. He left a fortune of about £50,000, and the Bulgarian Government will continue to his widow and children the pension of £2,000 a-year which he had for some time received. The Emperor of Austria, too, has offered to settle an adequate income on the Countess Hartenau and her two children.

THE ladies of the Munshi's household have lately been brought to this country at the Queen's desire, to make their home with Abdul Karim at Frogmore Cottage. Now and then their closely-veiled figures are to be seen flitting with curious effect about the grounds. One of the ladies is usually clad in black the veil shrouding her form completely from head to foot, and the other is in yellow, equally Oriental and picturesque in style.

It is said to be probable that before long the Duke of Coburg will retire from the Mastership of the Trinity House, which office he has held for many years, and will be succeeded either by the Prince of Wales or, as is more likely, by the Duke of York, who, like his uncle, is an officer in the Royal Navy. The Duke's retirement will be much regretted, as he has been a very efficient Master, and has always had the interests of the Trinity House at heart.

TIME was not so many years ago, when handsome, gallant, courtly Prince Alexander of Battenberg, who died so unexpectedly at the early age of thirty-six, was a prime favourite at Windsor, the Queen liking him immensely for his chivalrous bearing, his pleasant wit, and his known courage. At that time life seemed full of the fairest promise for him, and it was thought that he would make a brilliant marriage, which would have allied him very closely with our Royal house.

## STATISTICS.

A TOBACCO plant will produce 360,000 seeds.

A GENERATION is calculated to average thirty-three years and four months.

THE total number of horses in the United Kingdom is officially put down at 2,079,587. The number last year was 2,067,549.

In some parts of New Zealand orange growing is a very profitable industry. Sometimes the crop from an acre of trees amounts in value to more than £200.

THE number of Baptist churches known to exist at the present time throughout the world, is 46,502; ministers, 30,548; members, 4,136,152. Of the ministers 1,473 are in this country.

## GEMS.

THREE things to cultivate—Good books, good friends, and good humour.

OUR thoughts are our friends or our enemies, according as they are good or evil.

HAPPINESS, not unlike the snail, is seldom found from home, or without a home.

It is a duty to make the best possible use of all we have, and to make ourselves and our surroundings just as good, beautiful, and joy-giving as we know how. Self-martyrdom is not an essential ingredient in being and doing good. The sun lightens the world by its own glorious brightness; and we cannot be full of cheerfulness, good sense, without others being the better for it. Nor can we have a charming home, with everything in and about it controlled by an enlightened intelligence, but the influence of a good example will be felt by all the neighbours.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE AND BREAD PUDDING.—Slice raw apples or make a nice sauce, and put it in a buttered pudding-dish in alternate layers with bread crumbs or cracker crumbs and bits of butter. Have crumbs on top. Moisten with about a cup of water, according to the juiciness of the apple. Bake about half an hour, and serve with sugar and cream, or with any sauce preferred.

CURRENT SCONES.—One pound of flour, one handful of currants, one dessert-spoonful butter, one dessert-spoonful sugar, one teaspoonful baking soda, half-teaspoonful tartaric acid, some buttermilk. Rub the butter among the flour, add all the other dry things, stir in enough buttermilk to make a paste, roll out rather thinly, put plenty of flour on the top, cut out and put on the girdle till ready.

PICKLING BEETROOT.—Wash six beets, gently taking care not to break the fibres, as they will bleed and lose colour; put them into a saucepan with boiling water tasted with salt to boil for an hour and a half; take them up, peel, and cut into slices an eighth of an inch thick, and put them in a pan; boil a pint of vinegar with half an ounce of peppercorns, a blade of mace, a dozen cloves, and half an ounce of ginger, and when boiled, add it to a pint of cold vinegar; pour the whole over the beet, and when quite cold cover tightly.

PICKLED CAULIFLOWER.—Take a fine, firm cauliflower (or two if they are small) and break it neatly into branches, which put into a basin, and after sprinkling liberally with salt, pour boiling water over them, cover with a plate, and let them stand till next day; then drain carefully, and spread them on a clean cloth, spread another over the top, and let them stand so a day to dry; boil a breakfast cupful of white vinegar, with a teaspoonful of peppercorns, a small bit of ginger, a blade of mace, pour it boiling over the cauliflower, and when cold cork tight. It is best to put pickles either in a stone jar or glass bottle; the cauliflower is good to use soon.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

IN proportion to its size, a bee can pull thirty times as much weight as a horse.

THE Israelites learned surveying from the Egyptians who had practiced it for ages.

THE Shah of Persia is the proud father of eighteen children.

TWO rings are employed in the marriage ceremony of the Greek Church—one of gold, the other of silver.

THE folding fan was invented in Japan, and was suggested by the way in which a bat closes its wings.

THERE were no italics used in the biblical translations until the time of the King James version, 1611.

THE smallest holes pierced by modern machinery are 1-1000 of an inch in diameter. They are bored through sapphires, rubies, and diamonds.

FRENCH paupers are provided for to a great extent by the funds arising from a 10 per cent. tax on theatre tickets. This tax averages £2,600,000 a year.

AN automatic electric music leaf turner is one of the latest patents. It is claimed for it that it can be easily attached to any piano music rack, and it is operated by touching a button with the foot.

BELGIUM is the home of the racing pigeon. There the sport is a national pastime, and a good pigeon frequently wins for its owner large sums of money, the prizes being considerable, to which heavy pools are added.

WHEN a Chinese girl is married her attendants are always the oldest and ugliest women to be found in the neighbourhood, who are paid to act as foils to her beauty. It is said that some exceptionally ugly old women make their living by acting as professional attendants at weddings.

THE Comstock silver mines in America are 2,700 feet in depth, and the heat in the lower levels is so great that the men cannot work there over 10 or 15 minutes at a time. Every known means of mitigating the heat have been tried in vain. Ice melts before it reaches the bottom of the shafts.

THE French woman, unlike her English sister, has, as a rule, a very good business education. In the common schools she is taught household book-keeping, and is given lessons in purchasing and useful expenditure. As a wife, she is expected generally to help her husband in his business, and sometimes she manages it entirely for him. In the small business she acts as clerk for him, and in the larger ones she is an equal partner.

THE title admiral is a modification of a Latin word, signifying commander. In the sense of a naval commander, it was introduced into Europe by the Venetians in the fourteenth century. The First Lord of the Admiralty has the government of the navy. The Admiral of the Fleet is the next highest officer; the Vice Admiral and the Rear Admiral follow. The Admiral's flag is displayed at the main top-gallant-mast head, the Vice-Admiral's at the fore-top-gallant-masthead, and the Rear Admiral's at the mizzen top-gallant-mast head.

WONDERFUL cradles of great antiquity have been preserved in museums. The cradle in which reposed the great hero, King Henry—Harry of Monmouth, as he was familiarly known—is still kept in Monmouth castle, where it is shown to visitors. In foreign Christian countries the cradle is an emblem of religion, especially at the time of Christmas, when in all Roman Catholic churches the Bambino, or holy child, is rocked in effigy in a cradle in the church, and the custom is perpetuated in this city at its particular season. The ancient Greeks used cradles and called them by names indicating their shape or form, such as "little bed," "boat," &c. They were mentioned by their pastoral poet, Theocritus. The ancient Romans also used cradles. German cradles are as old as the German nation. They were clumsy wooden affairs that oscillated on two rude rockers; and that simple, economical people retain the form to this day.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**LINA.**—Certainly not; most improper.  
**JONATHAN.**—The 30th September, 1877, was on a Sunday.

**A NEW READER.**—Before 1866 there was no trial by jury in Russia.

**T. R. L.**—The company must stand by the bargain they made.

**MARQUIS.**—Schoolmasters are not exempt from service as jurymen.

**TITAN.**—The gorilla, which is tallest, stands about five feet high.

**DOT.**—Try blanching, like almonds, pouring boiling water over them.

**CONSTANT READER.**—Cycling is undoubtedly hurtful to persons suffering from rupture.

**DUFFER.**—Write to the Secretary, Inland Revenue Somerset House, London.

**IGNORAMUS.**—Russia is one of the great European Powers. It is also an Asiatic Power.

**MARTHA.**—A domestic servant may give, and must take, a month's notice at any time.

**JEANIE.**—Depends on what the material is. We advise your having it done by a professional.

**ALICE S.**—You must give notice to the vicar of the church at which you wish the marriage to take place.

**K. M.**—If in good condition drink them; if gone sour, convert them into vinegar.

**LEWELLYN.**—Being of age you are at liberty to act for yourself. It is better, however, to arrange matters amicably between your parents if possible.

**INQUIRING READER.**—The words "The pen is mightier than the sword" occur in Bulwer Lytton's play "Richelieu."

**DOUBTFUL BETTY.**—It is evident that it would be a great mistake for you to marry into such a family as you describe.

**MARTIN.**—The office of the Patriotic Fund, from which payments were made is at 53, Charing-cross, London, S.W.

**B. C. F.**—We could not advise you about this unless we knew what price you could give and the class of range you wish.

**DISTRACTED ONE.**—A piano ought in fairness to be silenced at eleven o'clock, or only very rarely continued on till twelve.

**MARK MILROY.**—Many German clerks are engaged in English commercial houses on account of their superior ability as foreign correspondents.

**BUNICE.**—You can buy soap for household cleaning purposes cheaper than you could make it in small quantities.

**VALENTINE.**—Try what turpentine will do in removing the grease. If you fail, then use very hot water with a little soda dissolved.

**TIP TOP.**—No, a soldier who purchases his discharge forfeits all claim upon his deferred pay; if he got that, he might be able to buy himself off with it.

**RICARDO.**—A pall of water that contains a handful of hay, if placed in a room where there has been smoking, will soon absorb all the tobacco odour.

**MARCELUS.**—If the man was not born in the United Kingdom mere payment of taxes does not qualify him for the franchise; he must get naturalisation papers.

**MABEL.**—Wash the wall over with water in which a wineglassful of vinegar has been added to each quart of water. When dry hang on your paper.

**ELFIN.**—Some housekeepers serve lemon with mutton, but most people prefer a combination of tart and sweet, as in mint sauce or fruit jellies.

**UITA.**—First soften the stain with a little butter or olive oil, and when softened apply first spirits of turpentine and finish with benzine.

**LEO.**—The word Catholic is compounded of two words meaning throughout, and the whole; the Catholic Church is therefore the whole Christian church.

**DUCKIE.**—Young women going out to Canadian towns such as Montreal are exposed to serious temptations, and ought if possible to take situations in the remoter districts.

**E. N.**—Pass a strip of woollen cloth round the neck of the vessel and see-saw it backward and forward. This friction heats and causes the neck to expand, so that the stopper becomes loosened.

**LITTLE MIKE.**—Falling anyone to introduce you to a manager, write to him; but there are really no stock companies in town now; travelling companies occupy the theatre in succession to each other.

**LINCOLN.**—The Scotch banks do not pay interest according to the Bank of England rate at all, although that guides them, but according to a rate that they fix themselves, and advertise in the newspapers from time to time.

**DOWNY MAG.**—You must not give way to despondency because you have not been altogether successful as a housekeeper. Keep up your courage and your patience, and, in time, you will come out victorious over all your trials.

**CARLO.**—Madonna is an Italian word, signifying "My Lady." It was originally equivalent in Italy to the French madame, and as such used as a title of deference and honour; but it is now applied almost exclusively to the blessed Virgin Mary.

**FRED.**—The "municipal" city of London is not so populous as several other cities in the United Kingdom; it is the metropolitan area generally described as "London" which constitutes the "largest city in the world."

**A DEAD ROW.**—Generally results from hardening of the wax. It may frequently be removed at once by syringing the ear with a little warm soap and water, or by dropping a little glycerine oil into the ear at bedtime.

**TUDOR.**—Chromate of lead, ground fine, makes the best yellow printing ink; but yellow ochre, properly ground, answers all ordinary purposes; we presume you understand process of making which is rather elaborate and troublesome.

**RUDDY.**—The first lead pencils were made in the time of Queen Elizabeth, from graphite discovered in a mine at Borrowdale, England. Graphite, it should here be stated, is free from lead, and the term "lead" pencils is therefore a misnomer.

**YOT.**—Place the velvet face down on a piece of blanket, lay a damp cloth upon the back of it, and then run very lightly over it with a hot iron; that would steam through it and raise pile, besides cleansing; another way is to brush the face of it with a bit of damp plush.

**ANXIOUS PATER.**—Unless your daughter has genuine talent we can scarcely advise you to count much upon the money she will make by art; but you ought at all events, to give her the best opportunity possible for prosecuting her studies. Her masters will soon be able to give you an opinion.

## CIRCUMSTANCES AND CARES.

"THERE'S plenty of work for this morning," she cried; "There's baking, and scrubbing, and sweeping beside. But she went at the baking with laughter and song, And said, as she finished, 'That didn't take long!'"

And then to the scrubbing—and how she did scrub! The boards were like snow when she gave the last rub, Her hands were so soft and her arms were so strong; And she said, as she finished, 'That didn't take long.'

And then to the sweeping—she made the dust fly, She looked at her work with a critical eye, And yet all the time she kept humming a song, And she tacked to the last verse, 'That didn't take long.'

The dinner was over, the work was all done; And now for that errand," she said, "I must run! Six o'clock comes so soon when the days are so long." And she went humming a verse of that song.

The road she'd to travel was as straight as a die, She knew every step and she meant just to fly; But she met an acquaintance down there by the stile, And somehow—that errand—it took a good while.

M. V.

**MINA.**—Washing occasionally with water containing a little borax will bring away the scurf, and render the hair soft and silky, and it is affirmed that paraffin oil (with which you have dissolved some camphor) rubbed into roots of hair is one of the best restoratives going.

**JESSIE.**—They may be relieved of them by placing a clean white cloth over their cage at night. In the morning the cloth will be covered with minute red spots, so small that they can hardly be seen with the naked eye. These are the parasites, a source of great annoyance to the birds.

**A. E.**—The term originated after the battle of Hastings, when William, Duke of Normandy was marching on Dover. The men east of the Medway came out to greet him adorned with green branches. This so much gratified him, that he then confirmed them in their ancient privileges, and they called themselves *invicta* (unconquered).

**SWEET BELLE MARJORIE.**—Lay it on a flat surface and place over it two folds of linen wrung out of soft, slightly warm water. Put a weight on this, and leave it on for a night. In the morning remove it, and put on another clean linen damped in a similar manner. Continue the process till the cloths come off clean when removed. Wipe it dry, and when quite dry, apply a little clear varnish.

**KATE KEARNEY.**—Put three or four rusty nails in a quart bottle of water, and let the water remain undisturbed for about ten days. Then shake the bottle and pour out on a sponge enough of the water to saturate it. Apply the sponge to the face very freely, and let the water dry on it. Do this at night, and in the morning wash off with a solution of powdered borax and tepid water.

**MADGIE.**—The old-fashioned notion in relation to the impoliteness of taking the last upon the plate has entirely exploded. It is now regarded as a refection upon the hostess. Should one refuse to take the last piece merely because it was the last, it would seem to intimate that the hostess had provided so poorly that if you were to take that, some one else must be deprived; and to take it, intimates that you feel quite sure the house affords an unlimited supply.

**VERA.**—To whiten the arms wash them every night in water as hot as can be borne with soap, and rub them vigorously with a nail brush. Dry on a rough towel, and rub in any preferred preparation of glycerine—with rose water or cucumber jelly—until it is quite absorbed. In a month the arms should be smooth and white.

**B. K.**—Diogenes was a cynical philosopher; he lived in a barrel to show his contempt for the luxuries of the rich; Alexander the Great visited him, and having told the philosopher who he was, asked if he could serve him in any way—"Yes, you can stand out of my light," was the retort, and Alexander was thereby supposed to be severely snubbed.

**COOKERY.**—They should first be opened in the back and the gut taken out; then they should be well-cleaned in luke warm water, the heads cut off, and the scales removed. Then rub salt inside and out, and place them in a tub. In a day or two you will find them salt enough. You can then wipe them and either hang them up to smoke, or place them in a clean tub till required.

**GAFFER GREEN.**—Its discovery is thus told: One Mercutio Frangipanni, who lived in 1493, was a famous botanist and traveller, noted as being one of the Columbus expedition when it visited the West Indian Islands. The sailors, as they approached Antigua, discovered a delicious fragrance in the air. This Mercutio told them must be derived from sweet-smelling flowers. On landing they found vast quantities of the *Plasiera alba* in full bloom, rendering the air redolent with rich odour; and from this plant, which the present inhabitants of Antigua call the frangipanni flower is distilled the fragrance which afterwards became so popular.

**FEATHER.**—Cut the cloth from about two to two and a half inches long, or if you prefer you may cut it shorter according to the sort of rug you wish to make. The pieces should be about a quarter of an inch wide. You then get some ordinary white twine or string, as it is called, such as a grocer uses to twine up his tea, and a pair of stout steel knitting needles. Set up the knitting with the string to be worked in narrow strips. When set up knit the centre of one piece of cloth into each stitch. Then knit a plain row back and repeat. When your strip is long enough take off and commence another strip. These strips are to be finally stitched together.

**MITFORD.**—You can get a very satisfactory control of the inside of these vessels by using a bent wire and a long strip of soft linen. Take a piece of an old tablecloth, about an inch and a half wide, and cut a yard long. Partially fill the bottle with strong soda. Wet the cloth, and soap all of it except one end. Hold this unsoaped end in the left hand, and put the other end into the bottle, pressing in with the wire all the cloth except the small piece held in the left hand. Now use the wire to carry the cloth about the inside of the bottle, rubbing until it is clean. Draw out the cloth and rinse with clean water. Wipe the outside, and then turn the bottle upside down to drain.

**TROUBLED HOUSEWIFE.**—No necessity for the destruction of the mattresses; brush them well with a hard shoe brush all over, but especially round edges and about the "buttons," then give a dusting of Keating's insect powder in same places, and wherever you see evidence of the insects; wash the bedstead thoroughly with good soft soap and hot water; when quite dry give all the joints and crevices a coating of paraffin oil with a small camel hair brush; that is fatal to insects, it does not stain furniture and smells soon goes off; go over bedsteads and mattresses at a week's end to note whether you have quite got rid of your tormentors; it may be necessary to dust a small quantity of insect powder on floor round legs of bedstead occasionally.

**H. R. G.**—The science is founded on opinions derived from the dissection of thousands of human skulls and the critical and exhaustive observation of their brains. Certain natural qualities and a few acquired qualities can ordinarily be read, and from these the specialist draws his conclusions as to what lines of business the subject should follow, or what qualities in a woman would best harmonise with his own qualities. Such conclusions can hardly be said to be in the line of phrenology, and, if inaccurate, cast suspicion, in the mind of the "subject," upon the whole science. It appears to be reasonable to conclude that phrenology is practical, but only to a small extent, inasmuch as qualities depend as much on the fineness of brain matter on its weight or form.

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